

2018 Volume 1 Number 1 ISSN 2535-549X

.nuart journal

Space is the Place

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Editorial:

Martyn Reed
Editor-in-Chief
Nuart Journal

Space is the place

As many are already aware, after a sustained local campaign by various cultural gatekeepers to reduce the popularity and impact of street art in the city, the Norwegian Arts Council announced that they would be phasing out Nuart Festival’s annual funding. The reason given was a lack of “faglig” competence – for *faglig* read “professional.” Although, perhaps in this context we can read it as being “not of the profession” – i.e., not belonging to contemporary art praxis proper. On the one hand, this has made life extremely difficult, particularly with regards to paying rent, supporting staff and admin in general. On the other hand, it has helped us to re-focus on who we are and what we’re trying to achieve – and of course, who and what it is we are here to support. We hope that the *Nuart Journal* goes some way towards addressing the concerns of the Arts Council and other arts professionals in showing that, although street art may indeed be “not of the profession” it is worthy of serious scholarship. It is not the culture that needs to adapt to fit the conservative mores of the institution, but the institution that needs to develop ways to recognise and support this vibrant, dynamic and fluid new form of public art expression.

In this Editorial, I wanted to take the opportunity to outline some of our ideas in a more reflective way – which I hope will give *Nuart Journal* readers a better idea of who we are, and why we do what we do. At the Nuart Festival this year, we’re encouraging artists to work as much as they can outside the framework of the festival, to get off the beaten track and explore the periphery – the side alleys, the edgelands, and those less obvious spots in and around the city – areas with the possibility of creating one to one encounters. This is not to say that we are abandoning the production of large scale works. We recognise that these are an important and valuable aspect of the culture – but to inspire agency in others, we believe it is important to bring street art back to a more human, and less authoritarian, scale. Similarly, we are encouraging contributors to the *Nuart Journal* to work on the peripheries of interdisciplinary street art scholarship and practice – thus, in this inaugural peer reviewed issue, we have included not just traditional academic articles, but also experimental and visual

pieces, and talks and interviews with key thinkers, curators and artists.

The streets function not only as utilitarian arrangements for travel and commerce, but also as deep repositories of meaning for those who occupy and move through them, as places of continually contested perceptions and negotiated understanding. The rise of the ‘neoliberal’ mural scene, has been, in many cases, complicit with the growth of aggressive environmental design through ‘placemaking’ schemes. This is leading to new challenges for organisers, particularly as mural festivals now normatively necessitate significant fees and funding. Getting a Herakut mural up ten years ago was quite different to the considerable logistics, let alone economics, involved in getting one up today. This top down ‘Disneyfication’ of street art culture must be resisted – we need to shine a light back into the margins with the resources and platforms that we have access to. Murals are an important part of the urban garden, but we also need to understand them as being in symbiosis with, and in debt to, the activist, the graffiti writer, the trickster, the sticker, the paste up, the stencil and the tag. In that sense, Nuart is fiercely protective of the term ‘street art’, no matter how corrupted. The ‘street’ is the grit in the oyster that creates the street art pearl, if you like. Or, as Situationist scholar McKenzie Wark (following Lefebvre) would have it, “the maggot within the fruit” (Wark, 2011: 106).

Ultimately, and perhaps – for an organisation – paradoxically, we aim to support the disorganised and unregulated rhythms and movement of the streets, to challenge the regulations of the municipality and institution, and the growing privatisation of not only public space, but also mental space – our very mental environment. In doing so, we hope to act as a counter to the growing forms of spatial exclusion attached to shrink wrapped consumerism and the authoritarian monumentalisation of street art culture that Muralism has achieved.

Street art is now being challenged – so many powerful people and institutions appear to have a vested interest in convincing us to lose faith in street art’s



Silo "Mural," Stavanger, Norway, 2018. Work and Photograph ©Martin Reed

power to effectively respond to, and reveal, our culture's corporate neoliberal structural mechanisms. But conflict – be it generational, geographical or economic – is the turbine that drives art forward. Urban public space, the arena in which we practice, is perhaps the primary battleground, an arena where different interests collide and different forces meet. At the same time, and perhaps for the first time in history, it is a stage for broadcasting the ethics, values and ideas of artists who are on the frontline, fighting power and the co-option of the culture whilst chasing happiness through the production of meaningful public work in a post-truth age of Trump, twitter and teargas. This year, Nuart rises to these challenges, initiating new principles for collaboration whilst exploring alternative methods of organising that will hopefully allow the festival, the journal, and street art culture in general, to become adventurous again. A few weeks ago, Nuart general manager James Finucane asked "What is a festival – was Nuart ever a festival?" which gave pause for thought. Eminent geographer Yi-Fu Tuan in his seminal *Space and Place* (1977) defined *place* as 'security' and *space* as 'freedom.' We are *attached* to one and *long* for the other, and perhaps this is what makes Nuart a 'festival', providing the security of place whilst offering the freedom of space. It was with this in mind that earlier in the year we decided – in spite of the funding cuts and ongoing campaigns to regulate access to public space – to invite more artists than ever before – twice as many in fact – to organise the disorganisation of the festival and offer

the opportunity of greater freedom, of greater space for artists to move through and work in. Uncurating if you like.

This year, the *Nuart Journal*, and the Nuart Festival, take their title from Sun Ra's Afrofuturist jazz classic *Space is the Place*. This is a knowing nod to Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan's (1977) *Space and Place* but also a recognition that for some, art is the only way to escape the violence of reality. It's a call for street artists, urban interventionists, graffiti writers, the marginalised, the dispossessed, the unloved poets, unfashionable artists, academic punks, and out and out outsiders to come together and collectively support the development of a culture that we believe still maintains revolutionary potential. Although to some, at first listen, the abstract overload of Sun Ra's free improv, with horns squealing and blurting and squawking, keys and organs growing ever more cacophonous, can sound like unlistenable noise, it's not. Listen again, that tiny flurry of melody, that touch of be-bop – was that MC5, Sonic Youth, now Primal Scream? – that sense of 'space', of playfulness, of anything could happen. It's here, in the musical equivalent of the dense Paris Salon style of display, amongst the wildness and the noise, that we're able to discover for ourselves, new tones, directions, adventures and insights. A growing realisation that the tail was beginning to wag the dog, that we were in danger of replicating the structural mechanisms of those institutions we set out to critique, has seen a shift in Nuart's curatorial

focus and strategies. Madrid based researcher Javier Abarca (2016) has written insightfully on the creeping dominance of the authoritarian neoliberal Mural scene, rebranded as 'street art' festival, and the dangers that come with it: complicity with city developers and gentrification projects, the instrumentalising of art for tourism, murals as placemaking (or placetaking) the somnambulant street art tour, and growing corporate influence. Curators, organisers and artists alike shrug their shoulders in resigned fashion, "whatcha gonna do?"

Hopefully *Nuart Journal* offers some solutions. It's the constant risk, and perhaps fate, of the romantic, of subcultures in general: drift into obscurity, or accept the change, calcify into an acceptable form that pays the bills and become *classical*. This growing compulsion to conform, to look to the perceived successes of the centre, is in danger of defining a culture that is born of the margins, that requires the solitude of what environmentalist Marion Shoard (2002) terms the "edgelands" to survive. The edgelands, the interfacial interzone between urban and rural, and occasionally found within city limits, is where past, present and future collide – where unattended infrastructure constructions, powerboxes, train yards, tracksides, abandoned bridges, beneath highways, water towers overgrown by decades of Ballardian undergrowth attract the tag, the throw up, the practicing stencil artist, the surreptitious paste up, the unschooled artist and poets of the spraycan.

If they're waiting in the wings for acceptance and admittance into the centre, then no one has told them, but it's here that we need to be situated, acting as Tarkovsky-like 'stalkers' rather than 'curators' – opening people up to difficult emotions, hurting them in valuable ways whilst elaborating new forms of play, creating new adventures and new ways of seeing, uncurating the white cube of Alfred Barr's MoMA, of an art isolated from the world, and filling it with the playful noise of the everyday. We need to free art from the grip of the institution and give it free rein in our cities. Street art is popular at the moment, but that shouldn't occlude a more critical exploration of how it fits into the everyday – a space vital for what it can be, not for what it currently is. Henri Lefebvre, the Situationists, and Johan Huizinga all recognised the importance of play. If childhood play offers us our first profound experiences of space, of nature, of freedom, then it is here, at a more natural, human and personal scale, that the future of the culture lays, and not at the service of a grand mythical social utopia destined to be co-opted and dominated by corporate placemaking and city planning.

Many artists and researchers, alienated from the risk managed and infinitely measured mainstream, gravitate towards the margins in search of the freedom that unregulated, unmediated and often unpredictable space offers. Walter Benjamin's introduction of Baudelaire's *flâneur* into the academic establishment kick started a contemporary love

affair with the idea of removing oneself from the world, becoming a vehicle for the examination of the conditions of modernity, of urban life and alienation. But in a world of growing dislocation, it is a bourgeois conceit to believe that ordinary people going about their ordinary lives are not also capable of the same sort of reflection – and of being inspired by the conditions that have created a need for art in the street.

Tarkovsky's *The Zone*, Burroughs' *Interzone*, Shoard's *Edgelands*, and Hakim Bey's *Temporary Autonomous Zone* have all informed Nuart's thinking, but it is perhaps the thoughts of French Botanist Gilles Clément (2015: 94) writing on nature and the garden, that can be taken as the strongest metaphor for the battles we face in creating and supporting new forms of unsanctioned public art practice:

Garden books don't mention wild creatures, except how to fight against them, the vagabond has no place here. However, the garden is made from nature, and seeds recognise no boundaries between territory that is policed and space that is wild. For them, anywhere can be inhabited. The constant influx of mobile species represents a considerable force against which the struggle to garden is transformed into a war. There is no lack of arms. In the garden of my childhood, you had to obey the rules: follow implicitly the commercial instructions. We had to smoke out, spray, burn, weed, find every possible way of treating rebellious nature, so disastrously inventive.

The lead article for this issue of *Nuart Journal*, Christel Pedersen's *Subversive Weeds*, explores this provocative metaphor further in its discussion of the activist instrumentalisation of wild plants – or 'subversive weeds' – in interventions realised within urban contexts. Pedersen argues that such interventions are powerful in that they draw on, and play with, the unsanctioned approaches of subcultures and activist groupings, in order to target established structures and hierarchies. This is a traditional academic paper with a critical bite, with some prescient pointers for the future of critical street art practice.

This inaugural peer reviewed issue of *Nuart Journal* marks a pivot point in the development of what could be termed a 'critical street art.' This is a forum for critical discourse and commentary on urban art cultures and street art practice. We aim to publish traditional academic articles as well as making space for more experimental and visual essays. The journal is divided into three main sections:

- I. Original articles
- II. Experimental and visual essays
- III. Interviews and talks

In Section I, our academic articles deal with some of the most pressing practical, political, and conceptual issues facing those working with urban



Nature reclaiming Hjørvi murd. Stavanger, Norway, 2011. Photograph © Martin Reed

art cultures and critical street art practice. This includes discussions on whether and how artists can legally oppose the destruction and removal of their works (Bonadio); the symbiotic relationship between street art and photography (Blanche); the activist appropriation of 'nature' in art in urban space (Pedersen); and whether street art can – or should – be framed as heritage (Hansen).

In Section II, our experimental and visual essays provide a powerful aesthetic break from the more traditional papers of section I. Articles in this section are designed to unsettle, delight, and provoke – and to provide a space for less conventional modes of thought. These include an innovative work of historical ficto-criticism (MacDowall); a lyrical experimental essay situated in the urban metropolis of Rio de Janeiro (Soifer); an evocative photo essay on the unexpected beauty of urban decay (Tolonen); and a provocative artist intervention from Moscow (Kuznetsov).

Section III contains interviews and talks from leading artists, curators and academics, including Ian Strange on home and aesthetic destruction; Alison Young on art as interruption and as intervention; Adrian Burnham's exploration of the visual activism of Dr D.; Pietro Rivasi and Andrea Baldini on their efforts to turn the white cube inside out; and Nicolas Whybrow on why the future of art is urban.

At the end of Tarkovsky's *Stalker*, a train passes by where the Stalker's family lives – the entire apartment shakes. As the noise of the train begins to subside, the film ends. It is here, trackside, at the edgelands, where the roots of the culture took hold, and it is here that the future of a critical street art can begin.

If you'd like to join us trackside, see the back cover for the call for papers for the next issue of *Nuart Journal*.

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Original

Articles

Subversive weeds:

Bio-activist strategies in urban interventions

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This paper examines the activist instrumentalisation of plants in a selection of recent art works and artistic interventions realised within urban contexts. A common denominator for these is that they seem to play with or imitate the unsanctioned approaches of subcultures or activist groupings with their various critical addresses to established structures and hierarchies. But while these other types of engagement within urban space often have a political or social scope, the works dealt with in this paper exceed the confines of anthropocentric issues and relations. Instead, they redirect attention towards some of most overlooked and devalued co-inhabitants in cities: plants – and most notably those perceived by many to be less worthy of a place in the urban ecosystem: weeds. This paper is part of the rising field of studies (e.g., Bengtson, 2018) that examines urban and street art's potential to affect our consciousness of environmental concerns and our own agency within our biotic community.

In the aftermath of the bombings of London during the Second World War, different types of weeds propagated on the sites that had been demolished by the explosions. One of the most common plants in these locations was the species *rosebay willowherb* that soon became known by the popular name “bomb weed” in the local population (Mabey, [2010] 2012: 23). A similar case is that of the *cogon grass* that took over huge areas of former rain forest that had been destroyed by the American army's diffusion of Agent Orange – a mixture of herbicide, free dioxins, and turpentine – during the Vietnam war.¹ And then there is of course the almost mythic *ginkgo biloba*, the oldest surviving species of trees with ancestors dating back 270 million years, located about no more

than one kilometre from the hypocentre of the atomic bomb that was dropped over Hiroshima in 1945, yet astonishingly survived. While the story of the *ginkgo biloba* trees has become emblematic and a symbol of hope for surviving in the middle of the terrifying catastrophe, it is not a unique case. According to the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) about 170 trees survived within a radius of around two kilometres from the centre, in most of the cases because the roots underground were unaffected, even though the exposed part above the ground was in many cases, damaged (UNITAR, 2018). In Japanese, these trees are referred to as “hibakujumoku” (“A-bombed trees”) and in English as “survivor trees”. In addition to the surviving trees, the *oleander flower*

was the first to proliferate in the affected area, and it has since been designated as the official flower of Hiroshima.

The surprising resurgence of plant life in Hiroshima is echoed in recent discoveries from the area around the Chernobyl nuclear plant. An explosion in the core of a reactor on the 26th of April 1986 caused a significant radioactive emission, and in the aftermath of the accident an exclusion zone with a radius of thirty kilometres was established around Chernobyl. When the zone was reopened a few years ago, researchers found that specific plants, for instance the local *arabidopsis* had adapted to the high concentrations of ionising radiation. The French photographer and artist Anaïs Tondeur has documented the plants that were collected by researchers studying the biology of the affected area in her work *Chernobyl Herbarium*. The work consists of a series of 31 rayograms – direct imprints on photosensitive plates – of different plant species growing in the exclusion zone and collected by a team of researchers with the purpose of studying the impacts of high levels of radioactivity (Marder & Tondeur, 2016).

These and many more examples support myths of how specific plant species – in particular weeds or wild growing plants – may demonstrate a remarkable power of resistance to humanly caused catastrophes with their ability to survive local and temporary apocalyptic conditions. As the author of the book *Weeds: The Story of Outlaw Plants*, Richard Mabey, points out, we tend to regard weeds as defiant; “Although they follow and are dependent on human activities, their cussedness and refusal to play by our rules makes them subversive, and the very essence of wildness.” (Mabey, [2010] 2012: 20). Endowing plants with properties and characteristics, such as will or determination, that would usually be reserved for human beings, is to anthropomorphise plants. Vegetal defiance is by all probability a matter of perception and must be assumed to presuppose some kind of human agency. Nevertheless, the question of plant “intelligence” or “sensibility”, understood as the ability to respond to external factors and perhaps even to some degree communicate with other fellow species through their roots, or with fungi as intermediaries, is a subject that has preoccupied researchers for decades. Authors and artists have also long used plants and animals to serve as mouthpieces for social or political critique or as metaphors for, or allegories of, the human sphere with its social organisation and behaviours. Whereas the instrumentalisation of plants as a phenomenon within literature and arts has various historical predecessors, recent examples seem to point towards a new trope, and a new rhetorical figure. As I seek to demonstrate in this paper, it seems characteristic of this new trope that the figured or implied plants do not necessarily serve as referents for something that is exterior or other to their own sphere. Instead, they seem to be entangled in an artistic endeavour to scrutinise the semiosis between plants

and human beings, and, just as importantly, the interconnection between nature, state institutions, aesthetics, and capitalism.

In her article “Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces” Belgian philosopher Chantal Mouffe argues that any given social constitution will necessarily be made up of different conflicting and unreconcilable hegemonic projects, in spite of the smooth image of unity that corporate capitalism attempts to spread (Mouffe, 2007: 3). Mouffe emphasises the arts as a potential means to disclose oppositions and pluralism through different kinds of counter-hegemonic practices or interventions:

According to the agonistic approach, critical art is art that foments dissensus, that makes visible what the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate. It is constituted by a manifold of artistic practices aiming at giving a voice to all those who are silenced within the framework of the existing hegemony (Mouffe 2007: 2).

Chantal Mouffe's confidence in the potential of arts to challenge the dominant hegemonies through re-appropriations or occupations of public space recalls the Situationist approach in the late 1950s. Like Mouffe, the Situationists regarded artistic practice as a political tool and as a means to reconquer urban space. They rejected the dominance of capitalist logics in public spaces and considered the urban sphere as an important battlefield in the resistance to consumption culture. In their view, the rational principles imposed by capitalism inspired a conformist life style, characterised by passive consumerism and segregation between citizens. The Situationists wanted to abolish capital exchange and competition among citizens and instead strengthen creativity, dynamism and perpetual recreation:

More than an integration of the arts and techniques into urbanism, it is the broadening of the concept of urbanism to a total art of a radically new genre. And more than an art form, it is the collective way of a new society. A way in movement, far from the individual arts of today, and a perpetual play with the life inspired by the changing events that we ourselves generate (Nieuwenhuys, 1959: 129)²

In addition to this, they also advocated the need to create new situations and atmospheres and introduced the concept of “psychogeographic drifting” as a means to reconquer public space. Drifting implied passing from one environment to the other, wandering about – either alone or in the company of others – without a specific purpose or destination; to seek the unknown, the mysterious, and adventure. The old city centres were considered by the Situationists to be particularly suitable for this kind of drifting with their labyrinthine qualities.



Figure 1. Camilla Berner: *Black Box Garden*. 2011. Photograph © Sebastian Schjörring

The *in situ* work *Black Box Garden* by the Danish artist Camilla Berner (Figure 1) seems to display traces of this kind of psychogeographic drifting; or in any case, of a more casual and random strolling on informal paths across an urban space. The work was realised on a deserted building lot in the central part of Copenhagen and took place from early spring until late fall in 2011. The site, one of the most expensive in Copenhagen, had been abandoned since 2004 when a planned construction project was rejected after a heated public debate on its architectural qualities and adaption to the surroundings.

Berner transformed the site into an urban garden – although neither a regular ornamental garden with decorative flowers nor a community garden with vegetables and greens. Instead she cultivated the wild plants that had taken over since the site was abandoned. She did not bring in anything new – no seeds nor construction materials – from the outside, but used only what was already present on the site. In the midst of the wildness, she established a network of small, irregular paths, where people living in the neighbourhood had already trodden down the vegetation passing through, walking their dogs, etcetera, as a registration of the movements across the site. While the paths at once referred to gardens and cultural landscapes, they also indicated a demonstrative rejection of the rigid, rational order that predominates much modern urban planning – for example, the grid-like organisation of North American cities like New York – and opposed it by a spontaneous, rhizomatic order. Although Berner's interventions might be seen as an “occupation” of an urban space, this occupation was only temporary – it lasted only a season of growth – and she refrained from taking possession over the site by imposing her own fixed framework on to it.³ Rather, she reinvested it as a democratic, non-hierarchical space, “giving it back”

to the local population through a formalisation of the inhabitants' own paths. The paths came to symbolise the reconquering and rehabilitation of the multitude.

Deserted buildings and building lots in cities often seem to invite being taken over by alternative or counter-cultural groupings and communities, just as they lend themselves readily to different kinds of aesthetic investigations into the socio-economic interests and power structures governing cities and public spaces, as illustrated by the *Black Box Garden*. But the backdrop of an aestheticised romantic landscape-style garden can be an equally efficient locus for “counter-hegemonic” practice, although in a somewhat different manner. The Finnish artist Hanna Husberg's work *Culture Hors Sol* from 2010 is an example of this. It was installed in Parc des Buttes-Chaumont in Paris as part of an exhibition program focused on biodiversity. Husberg gathered plants of the species Japanese *knotweed* from different locations in the city and transplanted them to a floating structure made from EPS, rockwool, and plastic in an artificial lake in the park. At the time Japanese *knotweed* had been classified in France as an invasive species that was to be exterminated, but Husberg circumvented the rules by transplanting the small *knotweed* plants into a “safe zone.” In this way, the plants' most basic needs for water and light were ensured even though the plants did not take root directly in the ground. Husberg explained that the culture-without-soil method has been used for cultivation by the Aztecs and by various militaries to produce food in arid regions during wars, just as NASA is examining its potential in possible future colonisations of other planets (Husberg, 2018).

Although the floating plant colony might have appeared as an artificial construction in contrast to the natural, landscape-like environment of the Buttes-Chaumont

park, the difference was illusory. The park is just as much a construction as the *knotweed* plantation. It was conceived in 1867 under the reign of Napoleon III by his director of public works in Paris, Jean-Charles Alphand, as an imaginary landscape where the inhabitants of the growing city – and particularly the new vast 19th and 20th arrondissements – could come for recreation and leisure activities under the impression of being in a remote natural setting.⁴ The site was a former refuse dump and a depository for sewage, just as a part of it had been a quarry where gypsum and limestone were mined for the construction of buildings. The work commenced in 1864 and about a thousand workers assisted in re-sculpting the landscape; digging the artificial lake, shaping the sloping lawns and hillsides, and transforming the former quarry into a dramatic, steep mountain, rising 50 meters above the lake – with pointed cliffs, and an interior grotto, through the use of explosives. Water was led, by means of hydraulic pumps, from the nearby canal de l'Ourcq and lifted up to the highest point of the mountain to create an impressive waterfall. Thousands of trees, shrubs and flowers were planted and a miniature Roman temple erected on top of the mountain, completing the fictive landscape.

Whereas the park imitates a real, natural landscape, Hanna Husberg's small ecosystem of unwanted *knotweed* plants seems more transparent in regards to its own constructed nature with its rigid and mechanical disposition that could have been drawn from the scenario of a futurist fiction film. Husberg's work seems to challenge the cultural perception of plants and the natural environs – what is considered to be natural or artificial, and who has the power to decide what is, or what is not? At the same time, the work also seems to question the national or supranational EU blacklists of plants which in some contexts, and at certain times, are considered useful, beautiful, resistant etcetera and in others suddenly become unwanted because they are considered as threats to a given local ecosystem. As Tao Orion notes in her book, *Beyond the War on Invasive Species*, there is, to this day, “no unambiguous, scientifically defensible definition of what constitutes an “invasive species” (Orion, 2015: 48). In her view, the existing research within the field of invasive ecology is characterised by a striking lack of objectivity as well as by inconsistent terminology. She is critical not only towards the application of the term “invasive” as such, but also of its use, noting that the most widely accepted definition of an invasive species is one “whose introduction causes economic or environmental harm or harm to human health” (here, Orion cites the US Department of Agriculture (USDA, 2014).

However, this ‘official’ definition, from the USDA, seems more subjective than objective. Whose economic health? Does it refer to enterprising small farmers developing cottage industries based on available resources or, more likely, to multinational

Figure 3. Lois Weinberger, *Male Hills, Berlin*, 1994. Photographic work, 30 x 40 cm, Ed. 5. Photograph ©Lois Weinberger.



agribusinesses that need to eradicate “weeds” in order to maintain their bottom line? And how do you measure environmental harm or harm to human health, especially relative to the unknown, but likely damaging, effects of massive herbicide-based eradication campaigns? (Orion, 2015: 48). Invasive weeds and the influence of the herbicide industry on the national and supranational institutions are controversial subjects, and although *Culture Hors Sol* might seem to underact its own criticality, it is nevertheless an orchestration of civil disobedience – at least on a symbolic or referential level.

Culture Hors Sol is to some degree paralleled by the conceptual, interventionist work of the artist collective And And And, whose small bags containing goldcurrent wild tomato seeds were sold in the exhibition bookstore during DOCUMENTA (13) in Kassel in 2012. At first sight, the seed bags seemed innocent with their pastel coloured decorative drawings of branches of golden tomatoes and inept, colourful handwriting. But at a closer reading of the different handwritten statements it becomes clear that the artist collective endeavours to sow seeds of resistance:

BUYING, PAYING FOR SEEDS DOES NOT MEAN OWNING THE SEEDS, A SEED IS NOT A PRODUCT, A SEED IS NOT ANYONE'S PROPERTY [STOP], A SEED BELONGS TO ITSELF, IF YOU PLANT IT WILL BECOMING BECOMING“ / “PRIVATIZATION OF SEEDS, OF SEAS, OF WATER, OF CULTURE, OF FORESTS, OF POLITICAL DECISIONS“ / “UNCONTROLLABLE MINORITIES, CONSTANTLY EMERGING AND SHAPING WHAT BECOMES OF THE SEEDS OF REVOLUTIONARY BECOMINGS, EXCLUDED FROM HISTORY, RE-EMERGING IN UNEXPECTED FORMS, THE SEEDS OF CHANGE.

The bookshop at a big international art event is obviously not just any regular public space. It is an exclusive, privileged space and even those visitors to the exhibition area who dropped by the bookshop might not necessarily have noticed the small, discrete seed bags in their stand. But the point in selling the seeds in the shop is nevertheless an important underlining of the political message distributed with the tomato seeds; that the seeds – and maybe nature in a larger sense – cannot be owned by anyone. And at the same time, it appears as an ironic or paradoxical

twist to commercialise them in the same way that multinational companies commercialise seeds for specific selected crops and vegetables and, in a certain sense, colonise nature both through patents on plants and by contributing to a monoculture that has had a devastating effect on biodiversity on a global scale. The And And And artist collective uses the same strategy as the system it criticises in order to get its message through. Their use of miniature writing appears as an ironic paraphrasing of the fact that what is written in fine print is often the most important (and the most controversial) details. Just as Buttes-Chaumont park (where Hanna Husberg's work was installed) isn't as "natural" as it pretends to be, the seeds commercialised by the multinational seed companies are often far from innocent. The conventional seeds are to different degrees improved, genetically engineered, and in some cases patented, although this information is often obfuscated.

The choice of the tomatoes as political messengers might be seen as a reference to the first guerrilla gardening movement, the "Green Guerrillas", founded by Liz Christy in New York in 1973. Christy and her companions made seed bombs, or "seed green-aid" as they called them, from condoms that were stuffed with tomato seeds and fertiliser, and threw them over fences onto empty lots and disused sites in order to spread new life and growth on the deserted sites. The tomatoes are also at the centre of another

example of the subversive instrumentalisation of plants – the French author Nathalie Quintane's essayist book *Tomates* (2010), in which she established an analogy between tomato plants and political activism – in particular the Tarnac Group. In the book, she explains how to make organic nettle purine:

You gather some nettles (wearing gloves), you cut them roughly and then you chop them – I put them in a bowl and I cut with scissors? - No no, poor you, that would take way too much time, you chop them roughly and you can also mix it, you add a few dandelions, plantains that you have in your garden... Quintane, [2010] 2014: 13-15⁵

But what might at first hand appear as innocent garden advice to create a fertile ground for growing tomatoes is in fact an act of civil disobedience in response to a new set of regulations adopted with the aim of preventing the sale and transmission of recipes on organic purine in France. When Quintane wrote her book, a new decree had recently been adopted by the government. It stated that any kind of

commercialisation or transmission should require the possession of a certificate of product conformity. As the certificate was both expensive and practically impossible to obtain, the regulations were by many considered as a *de facto* ban⁶. Nathalie Quintane's transmission of her recipe on nettle purine is thus a direct demonstration of defiance even though it is not manifested through a physical action but as a linguistic articulation – as a written speech act. *Tomates* can thus be regarded as a case of discursive, "performative" writing that addresses its audience in a direct manner and confronts the dominant political and economic power structures.

Whereas Nathalie Quintane appears as a highly visible author of her agonist articulations, the Austrian artist Lois Weinberger is a much more discreet author of his works; he often withdraws from the "situations" he establishes. In *Ruderal Enclosure* (Figure 2)



Figure 2. Lois Weinberger. *Ruderal Enclosure. Burning and Walking*, 1993. Broken open asphalt, spontaneous vegetation, metal enclosure. 8 x 8m. Salzburg Festival Summer, Scene Salzburg. Photograph © Josef Neuhäuser

made for the annual Salzburg festival Scene Salzburg in 1993 (and again in 1997 for documenta X in Kassel), he broke up a few square metres of asphalt on the Anton-Neumayr-Platz in the middle of Salzburg and left the "exploded" square to be taken over by spontaneous growth from seeds brought to the spot by the wind or by birds. The square was framed by a metal fence, possibly to prevent people

from mounting upon or interfering with the small demarcated piece of nature that arose from the debris of the destructed spot – and perhaps also to create an – at least symbolic – separation between the human cultural sphere and the sphere of nature.

The scenario resembles the post-war urban environments mentioned in the beginning of this article, however with the important difference that in this case it was a planned and staged situation. Weinberger has provoked the collapse as a means for "scraping off" the existing socio-cultural layer in order to make way for a new spontaneous order, which emerges beyond human interference and control; he reboots nature and allows it to grow anew from a point zero. Instead of giving an area or site back to the local inhabitants, as Camilla Berner for instance does, Weinberger gives it back to nature itself. His non-presence can thus be regarded as a conscious strategy to withdraw from the situation or the "other space" he establishes in order to avoid imposing a new hierarchy or authorship which would conflict with the central idea of the work – that human agency is restricted to an engaging in creating

a frame or a framework for allowing nature to resurrect by and from itself.

In another work, *Mole Hills, Berlin* (Figure 3) the artist established a similar series of ruptures or seemingly natural “disturbances” within an urban environment: a series of irregularly dispersed mole hills on an unspecified site – perhaps a parking lot?⁷ But at closer sight, it becomes clear that the scenario doesn't seem possible. The mole hills have emerged on an asphalt-covered terrain and although plants sometimes manage to somehow breakthrough in impossible places, it hardly seems probable that a mole would be able to work its way through this kind of surface. As it is the case with weeds, mole hills are often considered to be a nuisance when they occur in locations where they interfere with the human-made order (in a lawn, flower bed etcetera). But, as with weeds, moles do not really show any respect whatsoever in regards to human interests and systems. Weinberger's interventions seem to operate as reminders of the natural processes and organic growth that has been forced out, or repressed, and thus have come to occupy the place of the outlaws or subversive undercurrents that threaten man-made and capitalist rational order.

With their direct and interventionist character, the works discussed thus far might appear as ramifications of the early environmentalist movement that arose in the 1960s and 70s, together with the increasing scientific knowledge of the environmental consequences of the exploitation of natural resources. This rising concern was reflected by a number of popular scientific and philosophical publications – some of the best known being Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962); Donella H. Meadows' *The Limits to Growth* (1972); Arne Næss' *Ecology, Society and Lifestyle* (1974); and James Lovelock's *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth* (1979). This period also witnessed the proliferation of grassroots activism, for instance the seed bombing and guerrilla gardening movements in New York in the 1970, the establishment of a number of non-governmental environmental organisations, and the formation of new “green” political parties in several Western countries. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it also had repercussions within the arts – in the development of land art and earth works, and in the evolving field of ecological art. However, whereas land and earth works were often located in remote rural settings, the works dealt with in this paper are ingrained in urban contexts.

Not only are these works implanted in different urban contexts, they also seem to share an activist approach – at least in the sense of a conscious play with signs and connotations of the unsanctioned and rebellious. They operate on the frontiers of activism and defiance, and in some cases even break laws (Camilla Berner's *Black Box Garden* and Hanna Husberg's *Culture Hors Sol*) or simulate resistance and deconstruction of the smooth, established order (Lois Weinberger's

Ruderal Enclosure and *Mole Hills, Berlin*). However, only in a few cases (Nathalie Quintane's *Tomatoes* and And And And's goldcurrent wild tomato seed bags) has this resistance been articulated in a clear and unambiguous way.

These bio-activist interventions use different tools and strategies than those usually associated with activism – demonstrations, blockades, distribution of tracts, posters, graffiti and, in the more radical cases, occupations, vandalism etcetera. Instead, they may take on a multitude of shapes, and appear in a multitude of contexts. Whereas conventional activism, however planned it might have been at the outset, often seems to be characterised by a certain degree of unpredictability and spontaneity as it develops, artistic activism, at least in the cases discussed here, seems to a larger extent to follow a set of conceptual and aesthetic outlines for the work drawn in advance. Furthermore, formal and aesthetic principles seem to play a significant role, while the agonistic content to some degree seems subordinated to these. However, this does not necessarily weaken the counter-hegemonic potential of these works – it may in fact even strengthen the potential for further bio-activist articulations occurring in unexpected contexts and in a variety of manifestations.

In large cities, such as Barcelona and Paris, herbicides are no longer used to extinguish weeds in public areas in order to protect biodiversity, and weeds are starting to become a common feature in the urban environment. In Bordeaux, the local authorities distribute wild flower seeds to attract honey bees and pollinators, and encourage citizens to spread the seeds in public areas. In Paris, local authorities have started to “outsource” public space to local citizens, who can apply, for free, for a “permis de végétaliser” [permit for planting] for different public spaces, mainly in the disused areas along the roads, between trees etcetera. The inspiration for these new initiatives seems clear. Collectives such as the Green Guerrillas no longer have a monopoly on this kind of urban rebellion and re-appropriation of common spaces. Now, not only artists, but also local authorities in different cities are imitating their strategies and methods. Just as multinational companies increasingly adopt the strategies and codes deployed by subcultures for use in marketing campaigns (Mouffe, 2007), local authorities and municipalities in different cities are now similarly adopting activist, subcultural practices by distributing seeds and encouraging citizens to contribute to the seed bombing of deserted and uncultivated areas – and thus to invest sites and spaces with new meaning and value. Whereas according to Mouffe, the appropriation of the subcultural means that critical power is neutralised, it might be that these new currents could lay the foundations for a fruitful critical alliance between local authorities and citizens.

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dada by the Romanian-French poet and performance artist Tristan Tzara and, currently, *Panégryque* by Guy Debord). She is the author of several articles on contemporary art and the environment, and has written for anthologies and art reviews. In addition to these activities, she is researching for a book on the Icelandic art scene of the 1960s and 70s, focusing on the collaborative and network-based aspects as well as on the exchanges with international artists.

- 1 It must be stressed that these examples of war situations and ecological catastrophes all had immense impacts on both human and animal life as well as on the vegetation and ecosystem, both immediately and in a long-term perspective. As this text is focused on plants, I will however restrict myself to these examples from the biological sphere. Please note that an earlier version of some of these arguments has appeared in Pedersen (2016).
- 2 "Plus qu'intégration des arts et des techniques à l'urbanisme, il est l'élargissement de la notion d'urbanisme à un art total d'un genre radicalement nouveau. Et plus qu'un art, il est la voie collective d'une société nouvelle. Voie mouvante, loin des arts individuels d'aujourd'hui, et jeu perpétuel avec la vie que nous inspire les événements changeants que nous-mêmes engendrons".
- 3 Camilla Berner later described how she, while reporting her actions on the daily internet blog or "log book" which she kept in order to document the project, was very conscious of the fact that the owners of the site might be reading as well and would not necessarily consent to her actions, thus suggesting that the interventionist project had an "occupational" aspect.
- 4 Before creating Parc des Buttes-Chaumont, Jean-Charles Alphand had already conceived two other immense recreational landscapes in the outskirts of Paris; Bois de Boulogne and Bois de Vincennes.
- 5 "Tu ramasses des orties (avec des gants), tu les coupes en gros morceaux et de suite tu les haches – Je les mets dans un bol et je coupe aux ciseaux? - Non non, malheureuse, ça va te prendre un temps fou, tu les haches grossièrement et tu peux mélanger aussi, tu mets un peu de pissenlits, de plantains que tu as dans ton jardin...".
- 6 The official justification was to prevent possible side effects that could be damaging to humans, animals or the environment through different measures of control in regards to testing, labelling, packaging and sales conditions. An unofficial explanation might however have been that the law resulted from the lobbying of a strong chemical industry.
- 7 A large print of the photographic documentation of the work was also presented at the subway station Bernauer Straße in Berlin in 2017.

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Street art, graffiti and the moral right of integrity:

Can artists oppose the destruction and removal of their works?

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The relatively recent boom of street art and graffiti in many cities around the world animates and brings attention to the debate around their conservation. Can artists within these communities use the legal tools offered by moral rights laws to preserve their art? This note addresses this issue and, in particular, expands on whether street artists and graffiti writers can rely on moral rights regimes to prevent the destruction or removal of their works. It does so by looking at recent cases, especially in the US, where artists have started lawsuits aimed at preserving their street pieces or anyhow objecting to their erasure. The note also partially draws on semi-structured interviews I have conducted with several street artists and graffiti writers, whom I asked questions about whether they nurture interest in taking legal action for the above purposes.

Moral rights are protected in most countries of the world. They give creators of pieces that are protected by copyright (indeed, they are often incorporated in copyright statutes) a certain degree of control over the way their art is used by either the owner of the tangible medium that incorporates the piece (for example, a canvas as well as a wall) or by any other members of the public. Moral rights are protected at global level by the Berne Convention, an international treaty protecting copyright which was first adopted in 1886,¹ and introduced explicit protection of these rights in 1928 (the actual provision of this convention offering protection of moral rights is Article 6-*bis*).² The moral right of integrity is particularly relevant here, as it allows artists to oppose treatments of their works, such as mutilation or distortion, that are prejudicial to their honour or reputation.

In fine art scenarios, for example, mutilation may happen where a part of a canvas or of another artistic object is removed and the mutilated piece is then shown to the public. The case of Bernard Buffet's refrigerator is emblematic. Bernard Buffet, a well-known French expressionist painter, decorated a

refrigerator which was then sold at a fundraising event. The work was subsequently divided into six parts with the purpose of selling each piece separately (Merryman, 1976). A French court held this as a violation of the artist's integrity right and granted Bernard Buffet an injunction to prevent the sale of the said pieces.³

And what about distortion? This seems to refer to a physical modification of the artwork. However, some commentators suggest that distortion also occurs when the work is not physically modified, but when the message the artist tries to convey through her work is otherwise distorted by the treatment of the piece (Laddie, Prescott & Vitoria, 2011).

That said, I will here focus on cases where the moral right of integrity has been invoked to object to the destruction of street artworks, and on whether this right could also be enforced by artists should their works be removed from the original outdoor environment. In doing so, I will highlight the clash that may arise between the interests of artists and those of property owners.

Destruction of street and graffiti artworks and the artists' reaction

Street art and graffiti are often doomed to disappear relatively quickly.⁴ This has been a characterizing feature of these forms of art since their very beginning. As has been noted by Alison Young, their main factor is the constant physiological turnover of artworks that keeps cities in flux: as new images are created, others vanish (Young, 2014). And indeed, many street artists and graffiti writers that I have spoken to in the context of my ethnographic research have confirmed they are not bothered if and when their pieces disappear.

These artistic subcultures however are experiencing an evolution, as also shown by the seminal 5Pointz case, which I discuss below. Also, several artists I interviewed have admitted that they would try to fight a legal case to preserve their pieces, especially if they had easy access and the financial means to afford a lawyer. The desire to pursue legal action is stronger where artists create big (and legal) murals or are anyway involved in large projects, which require weeks of intense work. Conversely, and symmetrically, where the pieces have been created illegally (e.g., in case of graffiti bombing executed on trains, or tagging on city walls) such interest in legal protection is less pronounced, if not close to nil.

Thus, apart from hardcore illegal bombing and tagging, it seems that many street artists and graffiti writers are interested not just in relying on social norms to regulate creative processes within their subcultures – such norms, including the “don’t go over” rule typical of graffiti writers’ communities, have been analysed by Marta Ilijadica in her book “Copyright Beyond Law” (Ilijadica, 2016; Mubi-Brighenti, 2010); a growing number of them also take into consideration conventional legal routes to try to preserve their works.

The burgeoning interest of street and graffiti artists in legal tools aimed at conserving their works is reflected in a broader phenomenon, namely the increasing social acceptance of these forms of art. Indeed, as noted by Ronald Kramer, as opposed to the early days of these artistic movements (especially, graffiti bombing) when illegality was the rule, many artists within these communities nowadays produce their works legally, seeking social acceptance for their practice and creative outputs (Kramer, 2014; Schacter, 2016).

The 5Pointz case

Surprisingly, a jurisdiction that explicitly offers visual artists, including street and graffiti art practitioners, a right to prevent the destruction of their works (as a subset of the moral right of integrity) is the United States.⁵ The Visual Artists Rights Act (VARA) 1990 allows artists to oppose the destruction of pieces that have “recognized stature”. This requirement is a sort

of gate-keeping mechanism, being protection (against destruction) available just to artworks that art experts, the art community or society in general considers as having artistic merit, as clarified in the seminal case *Carter v. Helmsley-Spear Inc.*⁶

VARA has been recently tested in the case surrounding the demolition of 5Pointz, the well-known New York mural complex. Although the 5Pointz artists were not able to save the site from destruction in a preliminary proceedings which denied them an injunction,⁷ in February 2018 Judge Frederic Block of the New York District Court awarded a record sum of \$6.7 million to twenty-one 5Pointz graffiti and street artists in statutory damages (this is the highest amount ever awarded under VARA, and the first time these forms of art received such protection in the US).⁸ Not only did the judge find that the whitewashed artworks were of “recognized stature”; he also noted that the property owner had not served the 90 days’ written notice required under VARA and had thus wilfully and illegally destroyed the art placed on his building.

As far as the “recognized stature” requirement is concerned, the judge refused to apply the methodology proposed by the expert for the property owner who, citing his own words, “used an unduly restrictive interpretation of recognized stature that was more akin to a masterpiece standard”.⁹ In other words, following such approach, as Judge Block noted, only works made by artists like Caravaggio and Rembrandt would reach the “recognized stature” level.¹⁰ Instead, Block stressed that the 5Pointz artists could satisfy this condition simply by demonstrating their professional achievement and stature; this could include evidence of the placement of their works in movies, TV, blogs, and on-line videos as well as media coverage and social media presence. The judge also noted that even under the most restrictive of evidentiary standards the 45 pieces would still qualify as works of recognized stature: he indeed stressed that all the 45 artworks had also received sufficient academic recognition, having been appreciated by university professors, art teachers and other art experts.¹¹ He also took into account the artistic and social importance 5Pointz had acquired throughout the years and the highly credible testimony of the court-appointed expert. 5Pointz – Judge Block added – had become an attraction for New York visitors – with busloads of tourists, school children and weddings constantly heading to the site – under the brilliant supervision and selection skills of curator Meres One.¹²

The 5Pointz decision seems to mark a defining moment in the evolution of graffiti and street art – which have been long considered temporary artistic forms. Artists within these communities now seem more inclined to try to preserve their work and the high damages awarded in this case may convince other artists to take legal action against property owners who threaten destruction of their works. I do not believe that, as feared by several commentators

after the decision, property owners will now be more reluctant to allow graffiti and other murals to be painted on their walls. If building owners respect the procedures required by law (which was not the case in the 5Pointz case), they will not suffer any negative consequence. Furthermore, the main procedural requirement set forth by VARA – namely, serving 90 days' written notice to artists which allows them to remove their pieces¹³ – does not impose a very cumbersome burden on property owners. Once this step is taken, the latter are legally entitled to destroy the artwork.

Other cases involving muralists

The 5Pointz case has not been the only dispute in the US involving paintings placed on external walls. The following cases, most of which settled out-of-court, are also noteworthy.

(i) In 1986 the artist Jesus Campusano painted a mural on a building in San Francisco, assisted by three painters and his partner. After the building owner covered it in 1998, his partner and children sued under VARA in the California Northern District Court. They claimed the owner had not notified them about his intention to cover the mural; the case was then settled for \$200,000.¹⁴

(ii) In *Hanrahan v Ramirez*¹⁵ a group of young artists were authorised by the property owner to paint a mural carrying an anti-drug message on the side of a liquor store. Three years later the store owner whitewashed half of the mural, prompting the artists to take legal action. The court held in 1998 that the piece had recognized stature because it had won a national prize, received the local community's support, and had been displayed in a government building as a photograph. The judge awarded the artists £48,000 as compensation and ordered the restoration of the mural.

(iii) In 2006 the mural Edward Ruscha, painted by Kent Twitchell over the course of nine years in Los Angeles, was painted over with no preliminary notice being given to the artist. The latter sued the US government, which owned the building, and eleven other defendants for damages under VARA in the California Central District Court.¹⁶ Almost two years later the case settled for \$1.1 million.

(iv) The "recognized stature" requirement was debated again in *Henderson v Ziman*.¹⁷ In April 2014, the artist Victor Henderson started a legal action under VARA over the destruction of the mural, *Brooks Avenue Painting*, which he had co-created in 1969. Henderson claimed that his artwork had major historical significance. While Henderson seemed to have strong evidence showing that his mural was of recognized stature, the artist voluntarily abandoned the case.

(v) Muralist Dan Fontes painted an artwork on the side of an Oakland building in 1987. In 2015 he filed a suit in the California Northern District Court against the owners of the building after the tenant had whitewashed the mural without notifying the artist as required by VARA, and asked damages for \$400,000.¹⁸ The case was later settled.

(vi) In 2016 Katherine Craig sued real estate developer Princeton Enterprises after the latter had allegedly threatened to destroy her watercolor work named *The Illuminated Mural*. The artist had entered into an agreement with the previous owner, specifying that the artwork would remain on the building for at least 10 years. The case was later settled with an agreement that allowed the artwork to remain.¹⁹

(vii) In 2017 muralist Monte Thrasher sued several individuals and corporate defendants in the Central District of California claiming that they had painted over his *Six Heads* mural, without the artist's permission, and substituted it with another mural. The case is about the alleged violation of Thrasher's integrity and paternity rights and at the time of writing is still pending.²⁰

Artists vs property owners

As epitomised by the highlighted cases, relations between street artists and graffiti writers and the owners of the buildings upon which their works are placed may get tense. Two conflicting interests are at stake here: the interest of property owners who may want to get rid of the wall, and the interest of artists in preserving their pieces. Who should the law protect more strongly? A broad interpretation of artists' moral rights of integrity, so as to give them the possibility to preserve their art, would strongly protect their interests. Yet, it would remove the ability of private property owners to fully control their spaces.

Several factors should be taken into account when striking a balance between these two rights, including the existence of any agreement between the artist and the property owner, the length of time the artwork has been allowed to stay, the advantages obtained by the property owner from the piece, and the public interest served by the proposed new use of the property once the street artwork is removed (Marks 2015; Quaedvlieg 2008; Dreier 2008).²¹ For example, when refusing to issue an injunction to prevent the building owner from demolishing 5Pointz, the judge found a fair balance between the opposing interests. He noted that the general public's interest was served by the apartments that would replace the site, including the 75 affordable housing units.²² He also highlighted that the public's aesthetic interests had been addressed by the New York City Planning Commission, which in response to community pressure, required a 3,300 square feet of the exterior of the new buildings to be made available for street art as a condition for the issuance of the building permit.²³

One may also note that the position of property owners would be stronger when the artwork has been illegally placed on their buildings (this was not the case in 5Pointz, where the site's owner authorised artists to paint on the building's walls). The decision by a property owner to destroy or remove the piece of art indeed seems here reasonable and obviously justified on property rights grounds. Yet, whether a judge should always side with buildings' owners in these circumstances is far from certain.²⁴ What is certain is that in several countries such as US and UK, artists that place their works illegally in the street have been (and are currently) condemned for private nuisance, trespass to land, and criminal damage, and have faced (and face) jail time.

That said, there is little doubt that in certain circumstances artists should accept the fact that placing their works on other people's properties may carry the risk of losing control over them – even when they have been authorised or commissioned to do that. This may occur where property owners or other people or entities that treat their works do so in a proper and legal way, for example by following the formal procedure required by laws governing moral rights (see again the 90-days written notice required by VARA). Also, property owners may be obliged on safety grounds to remove a wall or other surfaces where artworks are placed. Artists' attempts to prevent the destruction of their artworks have sometimes been rejected by courts on safety grounds. This occurred for instance in the case of a monument (a sculpture made from old wooden blocks) placed in the Paul Mistral Park in the French town of Grenoble, which was subsequently deemed a threat to public safety because of deterioration.²⁵ Similarly, security staff at the Royal College of Art in London destroyed a student's artwork on safety grounds; the piece consisted of a stairway installed between the college's building and a nearby fish and chips shop (Cheng-Davies, 2016).

Removals and relocations of street artworks

Artists may also be interested in preventing their pieces from being taken from the street and brought into galleries, museums, or other indoor venues. Recent cases involving the 'surgical' removal and relocation of urban artworks originally placed in the street by famous artists, especially Banksy, have been widely reported and commented on (Hansen, 2016; Hansen & Flynn, 2015). These cases are controversial. Indeed, street art is often site-specific, which entails that a piece maintains its artistic meaning as long as it is kept in its original environment.²⁶ In other words, these forms of art are part of the cityscape, with the viewer, the original location and the artwork being inseparable: as Alison Young put it, street art and graffiti are being "written on the skin of the city" (Young, 2005). That said, removals and relocations of street artworks often bother and frustrate street artists as they are often perceived as unacceptable

attempts to not only distort the message conveyed by the artwork but also profit from pieces which are placed in urban environments with the aim of being freely enjoyed by members of the public.

No legal cases have yet been reported where artists have started a moral-right-based action to oppose such removals and relocations. In countries such as US and UK artists might not have many chances to successfully oppose removals and relocations of their pieces by relying on the moral right of integrity (this is mainly due to the way the relevant legal provisions have been drafted by legislators). According to current US case law, for example, moral rights cannot be enforced to save site-specific artworks.²⁷ Conversely, in other countries, including several continental European states such as the Netherlands,²⁸ Greece,²⁹ Spain,³⁰ Switzerland³¹ and Israel,³² local case law confirms that in certain circumstances the use of works in contexts different from the one initially chosen by the artists might be opposed on integrity right grounds. Therefore, in these countries (as well as other states that have a similar legal system), a judge may soon find a violation of this right should the artist successfully claim that the relocation of her street artwork in a different setting distorts the message she intended to deliver when selecting the placement of the art.

Removal of street artworks from the street may also lead to the piece being physically damaged. This is what happened to Banksy's 2009 *No Ball Games* mural painted on the side of a shop in the North London area of Tottenham. In 2013 the artwork was cut out from the wall, chopped in three parts and then auctioned at an estimated sale price of £500,000 in the controversial exhibition *Stealing Banksy?*, organised in 2014 by an organisation named Sincura Group. At the time of writing, the chopped pieces were still listed for sale on the Keszler Gallery website, in the US town of Southampton.

It is also worthwhile to highlight what happened to London artist Stik's 2011 artwork, originally placed in the Polish town of Gdańsk (the artist is famous for painting his iconic Stik figures in London and other towns around the world). The work featured a series of 53 Stik figures holding hands to celebrate the local community. It was painted, together with a group of young artists, on large metal shipping containers. Three years later, the entire piece disappeared, and in 2015 ten pieces of the containers resurfaced (representing 16 out of the 53 figures originally painted), chopped up and offered for sale at a gallery in West London for £10,000-12,000 per section (Herman 2015). The whole artwork was dismantled in different parts and the mutilated parts were offered for sale (this case reminds us of the refrigerator decorated by Bernard Buffet).

There seems to be little doubt that these operations amount to mutilations of the artworks (in the latter

case this is also confirmed by the fact that some dismantled Stik figures shown and offered for sale in the gallery had the final part of their arms cut).³³ If considered prejudicial to the reputation or honour of the artist, removals of street artworks which entail mutilation like the ones described above (and their exhibition) might be considered violations of the artist's integrity right in many countries of the world, including UK and US.

Conclusion

Street art and graffiti have long been considered ephemeral art forms. Many artists within these communities, from the New York kids who started the graffiti movement in the early 70s to today's modern street artists and graffiti writers, have believed and believe that the transient nature of their pieces is a structural element of these artistic forms. Yet, these subcultures are clearly experiencing an evolution, with more and more artists now interested in preserving their artistic outputs.

5Pointz is a case in point. Twenty-one artists that painted on the famous New York mural point asked a judge to block the property owner's plan to destroy their pieces and once the whitewashing happened, they sued him and requested (and obtained) damages. What the artist Miyakami said in her testimony during the trial is quite revealing. She said that when seeing her characters mutilated in that manner by the property owner's whitewashing, it "felt like [she] was raped".³⁴

Also, after being informed about the building owner's intention to demolish the site, 5Pointz curator Meres One filed an application with the New York City Landmark Preservation Commission, aiming to preserve the complex as a site of cultural significance (the attempt was not successful, though).³⁵ All these efforts epitomise the evolution that street art and graffiti subcultures are currently encountering.

I do believe the outcome in the 5Pointz case leads in the right direction. Judges in other countries should follow its path and, where artists have solid integrity right grounds, prevent property owners from destroying street artworks. Obviously, such decisions should be taken where all requirements under the relevant statutes are met and after taking into account the legitimate interests of property owners.

Also, most artists dislike attempts to remove their pieces from the street and relocate them to other settings, especially when this happens to extract profits. Decisions by judges to condemn such operations, where these relocations are prejudicial to the artist for distorting the original message and/or result in a mutilation of the artwork, would be welcome. As we have seen, the chances of that happening are currently higher in continental European countries and other states that have a similar legal system.

Finally, it is quite well-known that most street and graffiti art is anti-establishment. Artworks are often placed in the streets to oppose war, criticise consumerism and question the function of modern media (amongst other messages). Does the fact that artists may rely on moral rights laws to preserve their street pieces constitute a contradiction in terms? In other words, would it be paradoxical for street and graffiti artists to ask for protection from the very state they want to criticise? (Davies, 2012). I do not think so. Indeed, traditional works of art such as fine art paintings can also be anti-establishment, yet protecting them through moral rights laws certainly does not constitute a paradox, and actually many fine artists do so. Such 'traditional' artists have often the same motivations as most street and graffiti artists: "self-expression, peer recognition, and a desire to strike back at society" (Gomez, 1993).

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- 1 Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works (September 9, 1886; revised July 24, 1971).
- 2 Article 6-bis of the Berne Convention offers authors the right "to object to any distortion, mutilation or other modification of, or other derogatory action in relation to, the said work, which would be prejudicial to his honor or reputation."
- 3 TGI Seine, 7 June 1960; CA 30 May 1962.
- 4 For example, street artworks may be removed from the owner of the house upon which they are placed, sometimes even accidentally. What happened in 2014 in the English town of Clacton-on-Sea is quite emblematic: indeed, the local council seemed to get it wrong when painting over a Banksy's piece – showing a group of pigeons holding anti-immigration banners – which could have become a major touristic attraction (Shacter 2014).
- 5 Conversely, many continental European states – that have traditionally protected strongly such rights – have not incorporated in their statutes an explicit right to oppose the destruction of artworks. In these countries only case law has confirmed that artists can enforce this right in certain circumstances: this is the case of, for example, France and the Netherlands.
- 6 *Carter v. Helmsley-Spear Inc.* (861 F Supp 303 (SDNY 1994) and 71 F.3D 77 (2nd Cir 1995)).
- 7 *Cohen v. G & M Realty L.P.*, Case No. 13-CV-5612 (FB) (JMA) (EDNY 2013) ("Cohen I"), decision of 20 November 2013.
- 8 *Cohen et al. v G&M REALTY L.P. et al.*, Case No. 13-CV-05612(FB) (RLM) ("Cohen II), decision of 12 February 2018.
- 9 See p. 31 of the decision (Cohen II).
- 10 See p. 32 of the decision (Cohen II).
- 11 See the Appendix of Judge Block's decision of 13 June 2018, rejecting a motion by 5Pointz owner to set aside the Court's findings of fact and conclusions of law and grant a new trial.
- 12 See p. 17 of the decision (Cohen II).
- 13 If the artwork incorporated in the building is not removable without damaging the piece, the property owner is still able to destroy it under the condition that artists have waived their moral rights through a written instrument signed by both the artist and building owner.
- 14 See University of Missouri-St. Louis hand-out from "The Artist as Entrepreneur" lessons, published at <http://www.umsl.edu/continuinged/artist/artist-lesson-VARA-ho2.htm> (last accessed 8 August 2018)
- 15 *Hanrahan v. Ramirez*, No. 2:97-CV-7470, 1998.
- 16 *Kent Twitchell v. West Coast General Corp et al.*, 06-cv-04857. (C.A.C.D. 2006)
- 17 *Henderson v Ziman*, No 2:14-cv-03042-SJO-AS (E.D. Cal. Apr. 21, 2014).
- 18 *Fonfes v. Autocom Networks, Inc.*, C 15-02044 CRB (N.D. Cal. 2015).
- 19 On this case see <http://www.craigslist.com/article/20170413/NEWS/170419900/colorful-9-story-mural-to-stay-on-milwaukee-union-building-under> [Accessed 6 August 2018].
- 20 *Thrasher v. Siegel*, No. 2:17-cv-03047 (C.D. Cal. April 24, 2017).
- 21 Other factors that could be taken into account when striking the balance between the rights of artists and those of property owners, including the change of destination of the building; the necessary adaptation to modern functional requirements; the costs of maintenance and restoration; whether the owner commissioned the work; whether the owner is an organisation on which a moral duty lies to take good care of cultural heritage; and the public interest in monument preservation (Dreier 2008).
- 22 See p. 27 of Judge Block's decision of 20 November 2013 (Cohen I).
- 23 See p. 27 of Judge Block's decision of 20 November 2013 (Cohen I).
- 24 In the US case *Pollara v. Seymour* (206 F.Supp.2d 333, N.D.N.Y. 2002, aff'd on different grounds, 344 F.3d 265, 2d Cir. 2003), although it was concluded that the artwork was for the purpose of advertisement and therefore could not be protected under VARA, the court noted that "there is no basis in the statute to find a general right to destroy works of art that are on property without the permission of the owner".
- 25 Trib. Adm. de Grenoble, 18 February 1976, in *Revue trimestrielle de droit comparé*, 1977, pp. 120 et ff.
- 26 See also Joe Epstein, 'London Graffiti and Street Art: Unique Artwork From London's Streets' (Ebury Press 2014) (reporting the opinion of London artist Stik: "I try to make my characters react to the space they are painted in. It's all about context for me")
- 27 See the cases *Phillips v. Pembroke Real Estate, Inc.*, 459 F.3d 128 (1st Cir. 2006); *Kelley v. Chicago Park Dist.*, 635 F.3d 290 (7th Cir. 2011).
- 28 Even a minimum de-contextualization of an artwork was considered by a Dutch Court as infringing the integrity right: the court in particular found that a large mural painting which had been specifically designed to hang in a particular building at a height of 90 centimetres could not be hung at the height of 2.20 metres instead (Byrne-Sutton 1993).
- 29 The integrity right has been held as infringed in Greece when an artwork was placed in a location which contradicted its purpose and spirit, or where the work was unjustifiably transferred to a venue different from its original one: see Counsel of State, Decision No. 1465/1954, Themis, 1955, 174; Court of Appeal, Dodoni, Decision No. 47/1956, 861. See also *Antonia-Belika Koubareli v. Evangelos Volatas* [2003] ECDR 19, a decision enabling an author to rely on her moral rights to prevent the publication of her work in an offensive environment on the Internet.
- 30 In January 2013, the Spanish Supreme Court held that the relocation of a work by the Spanish sculptor Andrés Nagel violated the author's moral right (Torsen Stech 2015).
- 31 Swiss case law has confirmed that a violation of the integrity right under Article 119 of the Swiss Copyright Act of 9 October 1992 may occur indirectly, namely when the work itself remains unchanged, but where the surroundings of the work are modified in a way that affects the author's interests (de Werra 2010).
- 32 Israeli courts have been willing to accept claims against types of use that damaged the author because of the context in which the artwork was placed (Oron 2010).
- 33 This was confirmed to me by Stik during conversations held in May 2018.
- 34 See p. 46 of Judge Block's decision of 12 February 2018.
- 35 The application was unsuccessful because the artworks had not been in existence for at least thirty years. The City of New York can designate a site under its Landmark's Preservation Law; see N.Y.C. Admin. Code § 25-302(n) (defining "landmark" as "[a]ny improvement [to real property], any part of which is thirty years old or older, which has a special character or special historical or aesthetic interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the city, state or nation").

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Street art and photography: Documentation, representation, interpretation

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In this empirical paper, I propose a 4-point system of classification for street art photography. Street art photography (1) functions as visual inspiration for other street artists. All street art actors take photographs (Derwanz, 2013). Photos can (2) act as documentation of the street work for the artist, but also for fans, researchers, police, home-owners, etc. Street art photography can (3) function as work-in-process documentation, work documentation, documentation of decay and of interaction. In addition, (4) every street art photograph is an interpretation of a work and at the same time a work in its own right.

Introduction

In this empirical essay based on 12 years of street art research, I specify the different roles photography can play in connection with street art. To produce this paper, I analyzed photos, street art books, and engaged with photographic social media accounts dealing with street art and graffiti. The main aim of this paper is to propose a 4-point system of classification of street art photography. As I will point out, photography (1) can be a visual inspiration for street artists. All street art actors take photographs (Derwanz, 2013). Street artists photograph their works after attaching them in public space. Photos can (2) act as documentation of the street work for the artist, but also for fans, researchers, police, home-owners. Often they also document the creative process or the process of installing the piece. Homeowners and police document the damage by vandalism or secure evidence. Passersby on the street or active street art viewers make spontaneous photos with their phone or a more professional camera. All of the above auteurs, and street art researchers often photograph not only individual works but larger contexts, such as a whole wall full of stickers or tags, often repeatedly over a longer period of time. Street art photography can (3) function as work-in-process documentation, work documentation, documentation of decay and of interaction. In addition, (4) every street art photograph is an interpretation of a work and at the same time a work in its own right. In this paper, I

understand street art as a self-authorized piece on the street that is not style writing graffiti. Graffiti writers write their name as a *tag* or *piece*. This is about style, and about addressing other writers, while street art addresses the general public. I build on these observations to analyse the photographic process, the differences between the photographs of artists / fans / researchers / authorities, and the distribution channels of the resulting images.

1 Photography as inspiration – Photos and photo books

Photography can be an inspiration for street artists – and graffiti writers. I start with this argument as street artists – and graffiti writers – often first look at other works, which may be in the form of photographs. Like all art, graffiti and street art refer to earlier works and (as those works may be destroyed within hours) to photographs of street art and graffiti. One of the best-selling art books of all time is a photo book about graffiti in New York – *Subway Art* by Martha Cooper and Henry Chalfant (Cooper and Chalfant, 1984). The fact that today we can find graffiti and street art almost everywhere around the world may also be traced back to the photographs from this book – as many influential writer pioneers have admitted. Graffiti has also influenced others via moving images, graffiti films, and music videos. Contrary to most

other art, people look at graffiti mostly on-site or as captured in photographs, and rarely in the museum. Hardly a work from photo books like *Subway Art* lived longer than a few hours or weeks. Therefore, graffiti and street art demand photography which, as a means of location- and time-independent documentation, creates the opportunity to inspire others and possibly to reach "eternity." Photos are often presented together with other photos. In relation to a photo book like *Subway Art*, the medium of photography serves to record works. As a collection of photos, the photo book itself, like any (curated) photo collection online, is at the same time an archive and an exhibition space that exists independently of space and time, whereby some aspects of the works' original context are lost.¹

Graffiti writers often copy style, such as the wild style or the bubble style. However, to copy works from photos is frowned upon in graffiti. In street art, actors also refer to photographs, maybe even more so, or at least more specifically, than in graffiti. Street art is often image-based. However, graffiti writers also use reproductions.

In street art, photos from the collective pictorial memory are often taken as treasure trove and reassembled. Here it is *not* frowned upon to use recognizable photos. On the contrary, herein the creative, artistic spark often ignites exactly at the reputation of the known photo source, which gets a new twist, for instance when Banksy reworks the *Mona Lisa* or *Che Guevara*.

2 Photography as documentation

The use of photography for documentation, at least by the artist, is often already taken into consideration in the conception of the street piece. So, documentation may start before the work itself, or as Susan Sontag (1977: 19) stated, "today everything exists to end in a photograph." Since street art is ephemeral, that is to say finite or unlasting, street artists often pay special attention to the fact that important aspects of the work can be clearly seen in the photo afterwards.

In addition to providing inspiration, photography is also a form of documentation. Documentation is always subjective, but often tries to, or pretends to, be objective. "The conflict of interest between objectivity and subjectivity, between demonstration and supposition, is unresolvable." (Sontag, 1977: 106). It is a *festhalten* (summing up/recalling/capturing/recording/taking down/logging) as street art is an ever-changing entity that has an expiration date. A painting can be photographed again and again to a certain extent. However, even here there may be some major differences in photographs of the same work – in colors and sharpness, before and after restoration, before and after war damage, etc. However, unlike sculpture and oil paintings, street art and graffiti are a highly endangered species. As such, it stands on a par with land art considering the degree of ephemerality



Figure 1 Barbara - Bitte nicht zerstören (es gibt keine Zweite) | Please do not destroy (there is no second one!) | March 20, 2016. Photography @Barbara. Printed with permission of the artist.

of many works. Its material manifestation may only happen in the moment of performance and it may then, likewise, disappear (Figure 1).² However, it is not quite as ephemeral or fleeting as performance art. Street art often interacts with the environment and changes like the viewer does – the next time one looks at a work on the street, it may have aged significantly.

a) Process documentation

Further, the manufacturing and process of installation of works on the street may be documented, often by the artist, or by people s/he has entrusted according to their direction – or passersby may photograph the artist at work. This is not primarily about the "completed" work, but at least in most cases the work is already clearly visible (Figure 2). This type of documentation emphasizes the procedural aspect of street art and is also part of its authentication.

The performative is inscribed into most works of street art and graffiti (Figure 2). Here the motif is not always in the foreground (Figure 3), but may reside, for example, in the fact that someone has sprayed a simple piece on a high-rise roof. The viewer may ask, how did one get up there? How could the artist work illegally at this dangerous, hard-to-reach-point without being arrested, without falling down? The time aspect of process documentation is usually caught in photo sequences, the location and performative aspect in context shots showing the setting of the street art performance.

The medium of video often emphasizes – even more than photographs – the importance of the action of attaching a work. A video without cuts, showing time and space, is first and foremost an animated serial photo sequence. Here we are close to performance,



Figure 2. Barbara, Bitte nicht zerstören (es gibt keine Zweite) [Please do not destroy (there is no second one)], March 20, 2016. Photography © Barbara. Printed with permission of the artist.

a *context shot* is a photograph where the main motif is smaller, but where more of the overall location becomes visible, including possible location references and allusions, that cannot be seen in close-up of the main work (Figure 3).

The photograph abolishes and emphasizes the transience/ephemerality of the work on the street at the same time. It refers to the liveliness of the piece. As in the case of a photographic portrait of a human,

we see a momentary

happening, the unique theatrical, physical moment, which one does not see in the finished work, but its traces are inscribed in the documentation, for instance roof top graffiti or the burning of items (Figure 2).

As street art is often illegal or self-authorized (Blanché, 2016), the photographic documentation of street art processes may emphasize the artist's anonymity to avoid prosecution. The fast, the spontaneous, and the virtuoso – which street art and graffiti celebrates – can be visualized especially well with longer exposed photo shots. By blurring and smearing light, the artist may be shown in a dynamic and anonymous way at the same time (Glaser, 2017).

The photographic documentation of the work's process does not have to occur in the preliminary stage, in the making-of the street art work. It may be of the work itself, or about a particular action, such as the simple showing or burning of an object in front of a street art background (Figure 2). Many street art events were staged specifically for the camera; there is no other "work" except the photo or video showing the process, as in Figure 2.

b) Work documentation

The artist may also document the finished work in context, with an urban background of a qualitative or quantitative nature, which appears to him/her to be the most suitable for the interpretation of the work. Thus, not until then does the background becomes visible as such. Similar to the long shot or wide shot in a film, this practice is not (just) about details, but about the street art motif in its overall context. If necessary, detailed photographs may follow, showing special aspects, elaborate details, etc. In addition, often following

snapshot. A street art piece can look different the next day, with different daylight; it can barely be visible or 'dead'. Photography shows the state of a work of street art at a certain moment in time and space. Every photograph of a street-art-work is both the work itself and an individual interpretation of the work. This becomes especially clear when comparing photographs authorised by the artist with those of fans. Often, other focuses are set, if a detail is not obvious. In some fan photos of Banksy's IKEA punk for instance (Figure 4), the towers of an IKEA branch in the background are not visible. However, a "different" photograph to that taken by the artist does not always mean a photograph of lesser aesthetic quality.

c) Documentation of decay and interaction documentation

After the photography involving the documentation of the work, the process of the documentation of decay and/or interaction begins. Each artist's documentation of their work before other entities interact with it is also a documentation of interaction, but one with the found situation. In contrast, the photographic documentation of decay is a reverse process documentation: "what goes up must come down." The documentation of decay, as well as process documentation, meets the serial character of photography half way. The paper tiger of street art learned to walk after painstaking work on the PC with Adobe Photoshop, Illustrator, or in the studio. It is then self-authorized and reintroduced into urban public space – and dismissed in freedom. There, wind, weather, sun, other graffiti writers, homeowners and city cleaners chase the piece. Since street art is an almost living artform, it is only a matter of time before it expires. The majority of street art and graffiti has

a limited lifetime, depending on the location and reputation of the artist – sometimes a few hours, sometimes a few years.

Part of the photo documentation of decay is the documentation of interaction after installing the work. Many actors on the street are more likely to communicate with each other and add motifs rather than destroying work directly. Faces get speech bubbles, beards and genitals. Each documentation of decay is a documentation of interaction, at least with nature. Street art is an interaction with the found situation, the background, the street, the site, which changes in public space just as the work changes.

The documentation of decay can be the documentation of a single work or of a more complex interaction. In some cases, entire walls are documented by researchers for years to come with “longitudinal photo-documentation” (Hansen and Flynn, 2015) or “repeat photography” (Andron, 2016). The long-term documentation of street art documents not only a work that changed over time but also the evolution of an entire wall or district. Street art viewers never know before, whether a piece is still there and in what condition they can document it, but many know *where, on* which walls, in which areas the probability is highest, to catch a street-art-work free in the urban wilderness, where to get in front of the lens, where to shoot it.

Every decay has a notion of death, like a *memento mori*. The German and English terminology on photography points to the hunting and killing of animals in a technical manner: *to take a photo, to get it in front of the lens, to shoot photos, a snapshot, freeze-framed* etc. Often the motif changes from a living subject to a passive object – a picture *is taken*. Something formerly living becomes frozen, framed, and hung. A photograph is a demonstration of power over the motif. As each photograph is a framing, subjective interpretation of a street artwork, the next step of almost every framing of street art is a potential commercialization. Street art cannot be possessed, but one can own its picture, look at it again, one can collect, store or sell it. Photography as the documentation of decay “shoots” the street art motif without “killing” it, but draws attention to its “mortality” – not until then is photography necessary because many pieces are so ephemeral that they only exist in the moment of the photo (see Figures 1-2) or in Sontag’s (1977: 10) words: “To photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed.”

d) Street art documentation as a series

Photography often has a serial character (Bailly, 1986). Process documentation has a progressive temporal succession, which ends with a ‘for now finished’ work.

In the documentation of decay the ‘for now finished’ work is the starting point for seriality. It does not even have to end with the complete disappearance of the work, or a completely changed location, years later – there is potentially no endpoint. Those street art works that are the most similar to photography, such as stencil, stickers, and paste-up and graffiti tags, tend to seriality – like photography itself. Their respective differences form a serial juxtaposition, because each motif looks different on every other wall, and the background varies, as does the nervousness and artistry of the street artists and their materials.

[T]he series does not really appear as a series (as it would, for instance, if it were exhibited in an art gallery or museum) although each isolated image is determined by the fact that it is part of a series. It might be said that the series is not stocked, but rather dispersed throughout the city like a mark or signature. Consequently, the particular serial effect, which characterizes this pictorial genre, is turned into a game of hunting down the images [...] [of] the series. Signs are repeated at different points of town; this repetition, tracing out a circuit, triggers the perception of a network: various series form a narrative network, and each image is at once a fragment and an echo of it (Bailly, 1986: 8–9).

There can be an order here, if one follows the tag of a graffiti writer within a quarter of a city. What is the individual work of stencil graffiti? Every single documentation photo stands for the work and is at the same time its documentation. Only in a sequence or as compilation in a publication, can these documentation photographs challenge the viewer to view them comparatively – which can be more enlightening than the ‘best’ single shot.

3 Street art photography as a work interpretation

Each photo provides one view on a work and excludes others. A photo series (Figure 2) can document the principle way of viewing a work. Taking a photo is like interpreting a piece of music – the work of street art – each time the interpretation is subjective and a little different. The documentary photographs of the artist (See Figures 1 and 2) is arguably their own interpretation – in the conceptual emphasis on the messages implied by the artist, such as references to the place of installation (Figure 3). However, any subsequent interpretation by other photographers are independent interpretations (Figure 4). Artists do not always recognize all possible interpretations of their own work, and not all artists can put everything on record that they may wish to. The interpreter/photographer completes the work for posterity; the viewer does that *in situ* for him/herself.

The interpretation-photograph is like a story someone tells about a street piece from memory. If one has the chance to photograph one and the same work almost unchanged years later, one might perhaps change one’s interpretation, i.e. the framing.

What is the difference between a photograph of a street piece and the art object that it depicts? That depends on what is interpreted, the work – or the photograph. Due to the volatility of street art, this can easily be answered in quantitative terms: the photograph, because the original work often no longer exists. In this case, the work may manifest itself (for others besides the artist) *only* as a photo, such as when a subject is held against a background or burned (Figure 2). Because the street piece often also exists without a photograph and can be manifested through recollection from memory, photography and street art works are not necessarily one and the same thing. However, memory is not static either. It forgets and weaves in imagined details over time. The fixed viewpoint of street art photography contrasts also to experience *in situ*. A video may best catch/preserve the fluent and manifold interpretative options that an individual viewer may have *in situ*, since here the viewers' possible points of view are multiple. In a photograph, you usually only have *one* interpretative viewpoint, and the photograph cannot carry the *genius loci*, i.e. the atmosphere, the smell, the noises, the tactile experience, in the flesh – while street art *in situ* is highly immersive.

4 Artist or documenter?

For the artist, the researcher, the police officer, or the documenter, the individual photograph as such is – as an artistic image – *not* in the foreground.³ The photograph does not have to be the artwork, it can be the medium of the artwork. Documentation is rarely about the sophisticated technical or artistic skills of a photographer, but image composition, location, context, light, exposure, and time serve the street art motif, often with regard to other, similar, comparable works by the same artist, or to elaborate specific details and interpretations.

For fans and viewers, every kind of photographic street art document can go so far that the focus is no longer on the aforementioned never quite objective documentation of the work, but quite contrarily – the street art or graffiti may itself become the background. In the foreground is then the artistic aspect of the photography, which only as "byproduct" documents street art – as a punch line for instance. Think of a photograph of someone dancing on the street, and in the background there is street art. There are many grayscales between documentation and other possible forms of 'artistic' photographs. Street art may be an equal partner in an artistic photo, or fulfill a subordinate function. However, in the majority of cases, photographs of street art and graffiti photographs still serve as documentations of the work. In selfies involving street-pieces, the documentation of the piece is not in the foreground. The photographer turns into a co-author and co-motif. The work of the selfie photograph is may be proportionately, more-or-less selfie or more-or-less street art documentary, depending on what is emphasized in the individual photograph.

Further, the photography of street-art-objects questions authorship⁴ – there are always two creators who can overlap: the photographer and the street artist. The photographer may work for the street artist, or they may be self-employed. They may aim for an objective documentation, or they may seek to incorporate their own handwriting (or visually recognizable style) in their photographs of work on the street. In the 1930s, the Hungarian-French artist Brassai was the first to use graffiti as not only (as has long been common in paintings or photographs of graffiti) an 'authenticity dispenser' in the background. He used his photographs of the illegal scratch graffiti he found in Paris to appropriate these illicit markings as a form of art. We now consider Brassai's photographs as the work-of-art – his personal choice, framing and interpretation of graffiti, and not the graffiti pictured – while in the case of street artists like Banksy it is perhaps the other way around.

Street artists and photographs that interpret their works are also art educators.⁵ Street artists utilize/outfit two spaces, the street *and* internet, the analogue and digital. They are faced with a curatorial choice, between very different works (or photographic documents of the same piece) for instance, by focusing on a specific work phase or on a best-of series (Glaser, 2017: 111).

5 Street art and (digital) photo-reproduction/presentation

As street art is ephemeral and illegal, street artists and their interpreters often give special attention to the fact that important aspects of the work on a photograph are clearly visible. One must distinguish between different purposes at different moments in time, often related to the technical possibilities of photographing at a certain point in history. Brassai documented only scratch graffiti and drawings, since color photographs were still rare and expensive and were not often reproduced for these very reasons. If you wanted street art to be seen by many, you had to adapt to the technical possibilities as a photographer at that particular time. Brassai chose only motifs that came into their own in the photograph and



Figure 3. 'Throw-u-TUP crew from Berlin on the Bangkok Ghost Tower', 2011. Photo: <https://www.widewalls.ch/artwork/tup/bangkok-ghost-tower/>

looked strong and recognizable. They had to be seen prominently in the photograph – even if at the loss of details in black-and-white and halftone prints screened in a magazine, i.e. either single motives with little background, or the whole context, such as the act of scratching itself, not the small motif, became the subject of the picture.

In the 1970s, New York graffiti writers had to think for themselves about which side they had to paint a train depot, so that the commissioned photographer could photograph the work in all its glory, without shading around on a bridge on the right side. Shout-outs (the little comments beside the main motif) should not be too small to be visible in the resultant photograph.

In the early 1990s, when the internet began to be used, those early reproduction problems seemed to repeat themselves a second time. As web pages took hours to load large files, street art photos had to be small. At best, the main motive should even work as click stimulating a thumbnail pic. This corresponded with the pixel poor early digital cameras. Of Banksy's work therefore remain primarily digitally created photos from the early 2000s that only showed the motif without a large background. The street pieces of this period were often designed for such presentation views. The limits of technology influenced Banksy's early street art motifs and techniques. Already at that time, however, analog photos for print also showed more context and background that we are used to in the digital age today (2018). As early as 1947, Malraux (91) wrote that, "art history became the story of the things you could photograph" – to this, one could add, widely received is the photographable and those details one can perceive in a photograph.

As the majority of street-art-viewers shifted from the street to the internet – which occurred in parallel to faster loading times and better digital cameras and was therefore mutually determined – the form of street art changed as well. In Banksy's case, the goal was no longer to create a motif that could be reproduced on as many backgrounds as a stencil to be seen on the street by as many viewers as possible. Now he published just one work online, but larger and with more colors than before. This work and photograph then had to be perfect. To use

a stencil, a medium of reproduction, became obsolete from a practical point of view. It is reminiscent of the history of the medium and of Banksy's former works, and charges the new, single work with that meaning of the past. Artwork and photograph are mutually conditional here. If you happen to see a street work *in situ*, and the work was designed for viewing on a PC or mobile phone, it often seems disproportionately large, precisely because the artist already factored in the likely viewing size of the photographs, which need to have an impact even when viewed as a relatively small image.

For the third time these early reproduction problems were repeated with the breakthrough of smartphones and Instagram. Much street art is created with its presentation on a future Instagram photo in mind. Does the piece work in a square format? Does it also stand out on a small mobile phone screen? Many websites use the same photographs on their web view as they do on their mobile view. Both want the street piece to appeal. The artist factors this in. However, not only does the future photograph in the header influence the artwork, the comments below the finished photo could also influence the next photograph. Before the rise of the social networks, the acquisition of an artwork was often the only actual personal interaction of a larger audience with the artist. In contrast to the accident on the street, where the viewer only met individual works, street art works in social networks can be quickly classified into an artistic oeuvre, which can trigger an 'addictive' effect, since works in a series may be mutually reinforcing. In the past, this effect could only be achieved by artist retrospectives or work catalogs of later-career artists. Due to the easy and cheap presentation of the digital photograph, recognizability becomes a further retroactive effect of photography on street pieces.

Figure 4. Banksy. Ikea Punk. Fan photo by 303db, taken 28 Sept. 2009. Photo: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/303db/3942039289/>



Street art is an online gift for everyone with PC or a mobile phone access. On the street, you have to be on the spot. The digital reproduction of street art changed the conception of street art, but also the nature of street art as such:

The ability to photograph a street piece that may last for only a few days and bounce it round the world to an audience of millions has dramatically improved its currency. On the other hand, the internet is turning graffiti into an increasingly virtual pastime. It is now possible to achieve notoriety by painting elaborate pieces in secluded locations, without the associated risk of arrest that is usually attached. By posting photographs online you can become a significant graffiti writer from a town where none of your work is actually visible (Banksy, 2006).

In Banksy's quote, one also notices that the term "street art" is already a few years old. "Graffiti" rather describes the technology of application – not the location, like street art or urban art do. Thus, graffiti as a concept is more timeless and accurate in digital times, also because graffiti will not become obsolete by the possibilities of digital photographs because the term graffiti carries criteria that are independent of the peculiarities of photography. Street art, which has long claimed to be non-elitist, and to be seen by all, can fulfill its promise only digitally. When street artists spray in abandoned factories in rural areas, it may look urban or street, but it is not. It is still illegal, not only because it might be violation of property rights, i.e. vandalism, but also trespassing. Many photos under the label "street art" are then arguably actually "rural art" or "provincial art" created in small, not urban, but (post-) industrial areas. Many alleged street pieces are democratic and accessible to all, only in photographic form. Is it punishable to look at photographs that came about through unauthorized, illegal entry? Works like these can be viewed only in two ways: digitally or by breaking into, for example, a vacant factory. Often one can find out photo locations by looking at the geo-data or coordinates attached to digital photographs. Contemporary digital photographs are at the same time treasure maps with traces to the street art motif *in situ*.

Summary

All street art acteurs take photographs (Derwanz 2013). As street art is ephemeral, inspiration may derive from street art photographs, which are location- and time-independent to a certain extent. Photo documentation may start before the work itself. The artist is often the first to document a work-in-progress. Through documentation of the finished work, the artist fixes it 'for-now'. Every photograph of a street-art-work is both the work itself and an individual interpretation of the work. The photographic interpreter completes the work for posterity; the viewer does so *in situ*. After the documentation of the work, the documentation of decay and/or interaction

occurs. This is a reverse process documentation. Each photograph is a framing, subjective interpretation of a street artwork, which may lead to the potential commercialization of the work. Process documentation is a progressive temporal succession, which ends with a 'for now finished' work. In the documentation of decay the 'for now finished' work is the starting point for seriality – with potentially no end point. Only in a sequence or as a compilation, may documentation photographs provoke the viewer to see the work in a more complex comparative fashion.

The photograph of the street piece and the piece itself do not have to be the same thing, but they often cannot be separated either. The photography of street-art-objects questions authorship; there are always two creators who can overlap, the photographer and street artist. Photographers have had to adapt to the technical possibilities of particular historical periods, be it black and white, or early pixilated photo files, or contemporary social media. Due to the accessibility of the digital photograph, recognizability has come to exert a retroactive effect on the photography of street pieces. The digital reproduction of street art has radically changed not just the reception of street art, but also the material form commonly taken by street art itself. Street art can now fulfill its democratic promise often only digitally, via photographs.

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- 1 Thanks are due to Eva Winter for this noticing.
- 2 Thanks are due to Eva Winter for this noticing.
- 3 Thanks are due to Laura Dermann for this noticing.
- 4 Thanks are due to Laura Dermann for this noticing.
- 5 Thanks are due to Laura Dermann for this noticing.

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Heritage protection for street art?

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The case of Banksy's Spybooth

In April 2014, two works by Banksy – **Mobile Lovers** and **Spybooth** – appeared overnight, 40 miles apart, in the Southwest of England. They each set a precedent for the preservation, safeguarding and ownership of street art. However, while **Mobile Lovers** achieved this by subverting legal strictures in favour of a socio-moral course of action (see Hansen, 2018) the disruption effected by **Spybooth** lay in its appropriation and co-option of existing heritage frameworks. Through their site-specific placement, these pieces subverted the recent trend for the removal of street art for private auction without the consent of either the artist or the community in which the work is located. This controversial trend has sparked debates reminiscent of the illegal trade of antiquities (Merrill, 2014). The tension at the basis of this lawful yet morally problematic practice is grounded in the legal recognition of the rights of property owners to the tangible works on their walls over the moral rights of street artists to control the first distribution of their work; the rights of communities to assert ownership over works they regard as public art intended for their enjoyment, and the until now unrealized potential for the recognition of the value of such works to their communities of origin through heritage protection. This research note explores the case of **Spybooth**, and in particular, the precedent this work set for the protection of street art *in situ*, and the community debate this generated.³

Banksy's *Spybooth* (see Figure 1) was located on the exterior wall of a Grade II listed property in Cheltenham.¹ It represents the first case (in the United Kingdom) of a work of street art being extended heritage protection to prevent its removal for private profit and sale on the art market, and to enable the maintenance of the work *in situ* for the benefit of the community to whom it had been 'gifted'. Although it was granted heritage protection, *Spybooth* survived *in situ* for a period of just 28 months (14 April 2014 –

20 August 2016). The intervening period witnessed a series of attempts, by various parties, to either remove and profit from, protect and preserve *in situ*, or vandalise and destroy, the work.

In response to the efforts of the property owner to remove *Spybooth* from the external wall of his house for private sale, the local community lobbied for it to be retained as a community asset, and even engaged in DIY conservation efforts, and overnight

vigils, after the work was vandalised. In June 2014, the local council initially intervened in this dispute by issuing a temporary stop notice that effectively prevented the work's imminent removal by a private company (under the instructions of the owner) and in September of that year announced an application to include *Spybooth* in the existing Grade II heritage listing of the property, which would indefinitely prohibit the work's removal. This novel application was granted in February 2015 (BBC, 2015a).



Figure 1: Banksy: *Spybooth*. April 2014. Photograph ©Butterfly Art News.

Although street art and graffiti is yet to be awarded listed protection in its own right in the United Kingdom, there are some existing cases of historical graffiti being extended heritage status. English Heritage (who more often advise on the removal of unwanted graffiti from heritage sites) notes that "finely carved" graffiti at Carlisle Castle (dating from 1480) receives heritage protection as it is considered to be an integral part of this historical site of significance. There are also some instances of older murals being included in heritage listings, but these are protected as they form part of the original design of these buildings (BBC, 2015b; English Heritage, 1999). Internationally, however, there are some successful examples of works of street art receiving protection as cultural heritage in their own right. Merrill (2014) notes that these include murals by Keith Haring and Mike Brown, which are listed as heritage in Australia (Smith, 2016). In Germany, authorities recently debated the application of protective measures to a series of works by Blek le Rat and granted heritage protection to murals by Klaus Paier (Schilling, 2012). It should be noted, however, that these works were all well established and had survived *in situ* for over 20 years prior to them being listed as heritage. Banksy's *Spybooth* represents the first case, internationally, of heritage protection being almost immediately extended to a *new* work of street art. Prior to this case, this strategy – of the immediate extension of heritage protection to new works of street art – had been argued for (but not accomplished in practice) by scholars who asserted that works of merit should be listed as heritage due to the artistic and social value of such pieces to the communities within which they are located (e.g., Edwards, 2009; Webster, 2012).

The ultimate fate of *Spybooth* currently remains uncertain. On the 20th of August 2016 reports on social media suggested that it had been destroyed, although the owner claimed that this was an accidental

consequence of necessary renovations conducted on the external wall of the building (BBC, 2016a). However, some media commentators speculated as to whether *Spybooth* had in fact been secretly removed for sale on the art market, and indeed in March 2017, fragments of the work surfaced on social media, and were offered for private sale (The Guardian, 2017). Notwithstanding these divergent claims about the work's disappearance or destruction, and the widespread community condemnation of the property owner for permitting the work's demise, after reviewing the case, the council ruled that "any feasible action against the owner in relation to the Banksy would not be proportionate nor in the public interest." (BBC, 2016a).

The relatively brief lifespan of *Spybooth* would be entirely unremarkable had it not been extended a heritage listing which should have protected it from destruction or removal. The typical 'lifespan' of a work of street art is ordinarily far more fleeting than art or artifacts located in gallery or museum space. Indeed, street art and graffiti, by their very placement in outdoor public sites open to the elements, are ever vulnerable to degradation and decay, and to being painted over (or buffed) by local authorities or property owners, or reworked by other artists or writers. Some street artists (e.g., Swoon) work with the processes of degradation and decay to produce temporal works that disintegrate and meld into the urban landscape over time. Others (e.g., Mobstr) engage in practices of participatory authorship, by encouraging agents of the local council and members of the general public to materially interact with their work, thus constantly altering the original piece. Indeed, Young asserts that, "street art's ephemerality is one of its defining features... [and thus] viewing and documenting street art takes on an urgency because spectators are aware that it might disappear." (Young, 2016: 190).

During its transient physical existence, *Spybooth* was the subject of considerable media and social media commentary. This 'community conversation' about whether a new work of street art could – or should – be regarded as a heritage object is important to examine, as shifts in community attitudes and socio-moral norms are part of the conditions of possibility for the emergence of new heritage objects. This debate contains a number of divergent standpoints with regard to the work's controversial receipt of heritage protection. Within this public discourse, the affective states invoked in either defending or dismissing *Spybooth* as a potential heritage object as such are heightened and conflicting. *Spybooth* was described both as a source of civic pride, and, via the discourse of vandalism, as a source of civic shame.

Pro-heritage standpoints

Two closely related standpoints were used to argue for the protection of the work. The first was primarily grounded in the discourse of community and nationhood. This pro-heritage position represents street art as a "community asset" that warrants protection and preservation *in situ*.² Media depictions of the case employed rhetoric that described it more broadly as a "national treasure" that should be preserved for the benefit of the entire nation (The Mirror, 2014a):

Local residents and business groups... say the removal of the artwork would be a "huge loss"... "It has been a great asset, a lot of people have been coming to the town to see it. We want to keep it in the town." (Daily Mail, 2014a)

[We need] to ensure the long-term survival of this special and very important piece of art." (Evening Standard, 2014)

Categorising *Spybooth* as worthy of heritage listing also effectively repositioned the property owner as the steward of the work, with a consequent duty to safeguard it for the benefit of the community. A second, interrelated position also supported heritage protection, but this tended to be constructed as a defensive measure, against acquisitive removal for private sale, and secondarily against destruction, vandalism or degradation. Local politicians warned of the penalties for disregarding any such measures:

If they breach that they're in trouble. It's... a serious breach of listed building consent. It's a criminal offence (Councillor Colin Hay, Cheltenham Borough Council).

Indeed, according to English Heritage, the maximum penalty for carrying out work to a listed building without listed building consent is two years imprisonment or an unlimited fine (BBC, 2014a).

Anti-heritage standpoints

Standpoints against the heritage protection of the work include a position grounded in the categorisation of the work as vandalism (akin to graffiti) which, as such, should be removed or destroyed. This anti-heritage position was evident in the rhetoric of some sections of the community, and in the discourse of some members of the local council. It represented *Spybooth* as an "eyesore" that detracted from the value of the property and the community:

It's an outrage for anyone to be permitted to graffiti the home of another person without the owner's permission and then have the local authority prevent removal of the graffiti under pain of prosecution. In a more rational place and time Banksy would be in prison (Daily Mail, 2016).

Why are the council not prosecuting Banksy for vandalism as that is all this it really (Daily Mail, 2016).

A second position against the heritage protection of the work was grounded in an appeal to the rights of property owners. Heritage protection was positioned as an action that would constrain property owners from the profit they were entitled to, and as curtailing their freedom to renovate their properties (Rushmore, 2014):

By having a Banksy on your wall you run the real risk of having a grade 2 listing put on your building which affects your resale value. These building owners don't want the pieces on their walls. They don't want the issues surrounding the pieces (Statement from the Sincura Group. The Mirror, 2014b).

I pity the householder. He hardly deserves such an intrusion (Daily Mail, 2016).

The council's decision has been criticised for being 'short-sighted' by Robin Barton of the Bankrobber gallery... who tried to assist the owner of the house to sell the work: "It will very likely result in the terminal decay of the wall. There is nothing to protect the wall now. Now that it's listed no-one can apply any protection to it. It's absolutely vulnerable to the elements" (BBC, 2015b).

The owner of the house argued for the application to be rejected: "The Banksy was created without permission... it was not just unauthorised, it involved the commission of a criminal offence" (Evening Standard, 2015).

Notably, this discourse also often referred to conservation and preservation of the work as an aim, and employed the rhetoric of "saving art for the nation", but this was achieved via proposals for the removal of *Spybooth* for protection/conservation under private ownership, rather than via government

protection of the work *in situ*. Indeed, this rhetoric was often deployed as a counter to the pro-heritage standpoint that also positioned *Spybooth* as a "national treasure":

We are preserving Banksy's legacy... removing the artwork would protect it and stop it being vandalised. (Statement from the Q Company who attempted to remove the work under the owner's instructions in June 2014. BBC, 2014b).

Builder Martin Burnett, 48, said he was "furious" the Banksy had not been removed from the building. "It should have been taken off the wall and put in a museum for everyone to view it there," he said. "It should have been taken away instead of being left here for this idiot to come and do this [vandalism]." (Daily Mail, 2014b)

A final standpoint against the heritage protection of the work seems paradoxically to have more in common with the pro-heritage positions in that it appears to also position *Spybooth* as art of intrinsic value to the community. However, this anti-heritage position highlights the importance of the ephemerality or natural life of street art, and resists heritage protection and conservation as antithetical to this form of expression:

There is a certain fly by night aspect to Banksy's work, the medium of graffiti, its slightly subversive and transitory nature, no matter how well crafted. Not for others to cash in. So I'm all for it to be graffitied over or erased, destroyed itself as a subversive act. The message is made, the photographs taken. Removing it for profit, undermines it for me, transforms it into a consumable artifact to be traded (The Guardian, 2014).

Environmental art isn't supposed to last forever. (Daily Mail, 2016)

This stance is also evident in the material interventions made to the site – which were deemed 'vandalism' by the local press (see Figure 2, below) and which could, following Rancière (2004) be regarded as instances of aesthetic protest.

By examining community discourse alongside scholarly debate – without privileging either – we can more democratically apprehend the emergence of new heritage objects. Indeed, these very debates about what should count as cultural heritage are arguably part of the conditions of possibility for the appearance of previously unthinkable objects of

heritage. Indeed, the final anti-heritage standpoint discussed above – which prioritises the ephemerality or natural life of street art – echoes a position recently taken by some scholars of public art and critical heritage studies. For instance, Smith (2016: 377) asks whether, "a community [should] have a right to artificially preserve public art against not only a property owner's wishes, but also against the artist's intent when s/he created the work?" Here, Smith characterizes the artist's intent in producing a work designed to have only a temporary life as being oppositional to the wishes of a community in wanting to "artificially preserve" their work, rather than let it "naturally" degrade, or be painted over, as per the artist's wishes – or to be removed, as per the property owner's wishes. Smith thus positions preservation as an artificial and unwanted imposition that is contrary to both the artist's intentions and the homeowner's wishes. Merrill (2014) has previously offered a similar line of argument to Smith. However, his emphasis was not on the assumed intentions of individual artists, nor the wishes of property owners, but was rather on the living traditions of street art and graffiti 'as a subculture that places a high value on the ephemerality

of its material traces.' He asserted that, if considered as such, any resultant works should perhaps not be protected or preserved, as this may undermine the defining ephemeral and site-specific authenticity of this 'living' form of cultural heritage (Merrill, 2014: 17).

The rhetoric and logic of these divergent standpoints is also underpinned by different areas of law. Mulcahy and Flessas (2018) note that the first relevant area of law relates to property, and that, by English law, the owners of buildings automatically become the owners of any additions or alterations to their property. Thus, when an uncommissioned work of street art 'appears' on the external walls of a privately owned building, even if this is street facing, and considered by the community to represent part of 'public space' (Young, 2014), the work is considered to be a 'contained artifact' that as such will be treated as the property of the landowner, who may thus legally remove and sell the work. The second relevant area of law is heritage-related. Standpoints drawing on heritage tend to emphasize the rights of the community over the rights of the property owner, and consider street art to "belong" to its local environment, and to thus warrant *in situ* protection (Hansen, 2016). Some scholars note that parallels have even been drawn between contemporary works of street art and ancient artifacts – as forms of heritage that should ideally remain in their original context in order for them to retain their cultural significance (Mulcahy and Flessas, 2018; Merrill, 2014).



Figure 2. Banksy, *Spybooth*. August 2014. Photograph © Gloucestershire Live.

As this research note has demonstrated, these conflicting standpoints are evident not just in critical scholarship and law, but also in ground-level community discourse and debate. This perhaps reflects an emergent socio-moral code that may provide the conditions of possibility for future, community-driven challenges to the status quo. Arguably, street art often defies existing aesthetic, legal, and heritage conventions, and indeed may provide the impetus for shifts in the socio-moral order, which may contribute to eventual legislative and policy

change (Mattless, 1994; McAuliffe, 2012). Thus, it may be fruitful to study both the socio-moral and the legal precedents set by particular works of street art, such as the novel, albeit ultimately unsuccessful, heritage protection extended to Banksy's *Spybooth*, as these may be instrumental in challenging, transgressing, or otherwise disrupting established conventional regulatory boundaries and other aspects of our commonsensical 'division of the sensible' (Rancière, 2004).

- 1 In England and Wales, listed buildings are classified into three grades: Grade I: buildings of exceptional interest; Grade II*: particularly important buildings of more than special interest; Grade II: buildings of special interest, warranting every effort to preserve them (Historic England, 2018).
- 2 More recently, this socio-moral logic appeared informed a High Court judge's decision to order the owners of the wall featuring Banksy's *Art Buff* to return the artwork to the UK, after they cut it from the wall and shipped it to the US for auction.
- 3 For a more detailed discussion of these and other cases, and others, see MacDowall, Merrill and Hansen (forthcoming).

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Visual

Experimental

From Peterhof Station to Crescenzago:

Agit-Trains and *Griffer's Code*

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We pixelate your face as a bag is passed down to you. The red from the rear lights of a passing train are reflected in the shiny side of a stationery car in the lay-ups. I lick my lips then place tall tins of chrome paint into boxes, carefully cracking a door to let the sunlight in. Piero is still calling the look-out on his iPhone, not a burner. Through the park, we climb concrete picket fences and from here, the video whirls between locations: a train shed with red and white stock in the daytime, still no painting but lots of crouching, discussion, makeshift weapons, hand gestures, then crossing a six-lane highway against the traffic, Jim's red New Balance shoes with the green soles nearly get stuck on the crash barriers.

Boris punctures a can of mint green with some medical scissors and the paint flies out in a traumatic instant, like a final breath or precious oxygen leaving the airlock of a spacecraft. Finally, we are painting. Utah outlines the left side of her 'A' in white and we quickly glimpse Jim's work. Piero's already finished a garish mess and is taking pictures, then we are climbing out and waiting at Crescenzago for the running pics, but there's no time.

Under a white sky, between grey fence and grey train, Utah is wielding a long 750ml silver can like a wand or prosthetic, small arm movements making giant rough letters the height of the carriage. A round-faced man in a black Adidas top waves from inside the train, while Boris jokes in bad Italian with a passerby on a bicycle who in America might be a cop but here is just a bemused and sanguine local. The video finishes with a montage of running shots in subways, grassy embankments, more cans in boxes, trapdoors, tunnels and a whole train, aping the lyrics of the video's title song... "Going Wild for the Night... Fuck Being Polite." Now reverse the footage and show the painting flying off the train back into the can.

More ladders, more scampering over the roofs of red trains in a giant shed, bouncing on power lines like circus slack lines. The Ether panel in this section is especially beautiful, the way the E, as flipped 3, flows into the curved cross-piece of the T. Quick throw-ups, the guard snaps a picture of us, city walking, liquid paper pens on red fire equipment, mops over stickers

on street boxes, Boris' "conquest of spaces" slogan, blue on red and then a final barrage of panels running in subways through an oblivious public, ending with the train doors closing on the final beat of the music.

In a hundred years from now, or less, they'll be no jay-pee-gees or em-pee-threes. In this future, they'll be no more videos from the 2010s, or the files will only be available in certain closed apps or be corrupted by bots or they'll be so many videos that no one will know or remember why *Griffer's Code 5: Fuck Being Polite* was so important. *Griffer's Code 5* is part of a series of web videos about graffiti made by a Bulgarian graffiti writer and impresario known as Good Guy Boris. Beginning in 2012 and shot in a number of European cities, the videos captured some of the most creative active graffiti writers and set a new standard in the performance of graffiti.

In this piece, I imagine a past history for the connection between train painting and the moving image in Europe as presented by *Griffer's Code 5*. I also anticipate an imagined future where the films, or at least their original context, is washed away. To do this, I combine a detailed transcription of the scenes from the *Griffer's Code 5* video with a journey to some other stations, one hundred years ago. While Good Guy Boris, the American train painters Danielle "Utah" Bremner and Jim "Ether" Harper, and their new friends Giovanni and Piero wait at Crescenzago Station in Milan to take photographs of their freshly painted train panels, there is action at another station, at Peterhof, outside St. Petersburg. Ironically, the clue to their connection lies in the very first frame of *Griffer's Code 5*, a white screen showing the Griffers logo that Boris has created.

Before there is any sound or action, *Griffer's Code 5* displays an image of double-headed eagle. A symbol of Empire and the Orthodox church, the motif also appears in many Eastern European contexts, including the coat of arms of the Bulgarian Tsar Ivan Alexander from the fourteenth century. At the recent football World Cup, two Swiss players aroused controversy by making the symbol of the double-headed eagle in goal celebrations, supposedly in reference to their ethnic

Albanian heritage. The press reported: "Both players put their open hands together with their thumbs locked and fingers outstretched to make what looks like the double-headed eagle displayed on Albania's flag. The thumbs represent the heads of the two eagles, while the fingers look like the feathers."

Not really one for vexillology or heraldry, Boris had adopted the symbol from a local sporting club in Sofia but it also symbolised for him a connection not just to Bulgaria but to the whole Near East region that stretched from the Caucasus to the Anatolia and down towards Canaan and Mesopotamia. Boris also loved the nineteenth double-headed eagle, the coat of arms of the Russian Empire from 1883 until the Revolution. But to the modern eye, the two black birds look exhausted rather than regal, gasping for breath and weighed down with their individual diamond crowns. The most Imperial gesture of this coat of arms was the fist that grasped a golden sceptre with its own miniature two-headed eagle. With its opposable thumb and broad knuckles the eagle's fist looks almost human.

The two eagles are draped with a golden chain of jewels that included five other miniature double eagles. The tongues of the eagles on the Russian Imperium were meant to billow like flags but instead they sag like a choking, gagging tyrant. This gaudy display of wealth now looks desperate: the 1917 Revolution would sweep away this absurd display of power but then inaugurate its opposite. Boris would grow up in a bleak, flat, whitewashed world of communist cronyism. It is almost too obvious to state: train graffiti was ancient heraldry reborn, the return of the gaudy symbols of family and personal empires, repressed by communism. The decadent painted carriages would be like the once-royal cars that the aristocrats partied in across the 1880s, before the crash.

The five of us walk quickly across the intersection near Cairoli Castello. It is not warm and the early morning rain has left the roads shiny. Ignoring the zebra crossing, we walk diagonally across the roads but there is little traffic as Milan is slow to wake up.

There are tourists waiting outside the coffee shops, some sheltering under the awnings, another with an enormous blue umbrella. An American in pale jeans has slung her jumper around her waist as she talks on her mobile phone. The city trees glisten and the rain that drips from their leaves has pooled around three concrete bollards, designed to prevent vehicles from entering the precinct, prefiguring the vehicle attacks that will strike Las Ramblas, the Promenade des Anglais and London Bridge in a few years.

We are all loaded down with backpacks and the loose cords from mine slap gentle against my brown corduroy jacket as I walk. As usual the choice of clothing is a mixture of video styling and utility. We will need to look like writers on camera but be able to blend

easily into the morning commuters. Strictly active sports wear mixed with ex-army, Nikes on our feet and plenty of face wear, caps, beanies, bandanas, hoods and glasses. We'll also likely be climbing fences and crawling in tunnels, certainly lying in the dirt and in the event of a chase: anything can happen. We are ready for wet and dry, hot and cold, day and night.

We walk in unison and everyone's eyes are on the station entrance, but we walk straight past, ignoring the carabinieri smoking. The Italians lead us to the parkland and we prepare for the entry. Utah puts on a black bandana that Boris has given her, printed with the insignia of his website, a double-headed eagle with a short sword in one claw and a jewelled crown in the other, while a larger black crown floats above. As he pulls on his own bandana, dressing for the part in Boris' play, Jim thought, this is me and Utah, a pair of conjoined bald eagles, two birds in flight. The sceptre in our claws is pair of bolt cutters and the orb is a spray can.

In the days after the February Revolution, the Provisional Government impounded Tsar Nicholas II's train at Peterhof, outside Petrograd. Sometimes referred to as the Russian Versailles, the Palace at Peterhof was constructed by Peter the Great and often used by Tsar and his family. The first railway line in Russia was a single track connecting the Imperial Palace at St Petersburg to a summer residence.

Stabled at Peterhof Station, Tsar Nicholas II's train was the picture of luxury, painted outside in a deep blue with gold double-eagle insignia. Its carriage interiors were decorated in dark panelled woods with ormolu chandeliers and silk walls hangings. The carriages contained bedrooms, a kitchen and servant's quarters, a dining room and chapel. Writing about images of the impounded train at Peterhof station in *Red Star Over Russia*, the pre-eminent Western collector of Soviet visual culture David King wrote: "By contrast, Peterhof station was decorated with a supremacist influenced artwork incorporating a double-headed eagle tumbling to the ground. The slogan reads: *The Imperialist War and the Collapse of the Autocracy.*"

Even before the crime had taken place, the train yard was lit up like a crime scene. You can see my vintage watch with its silver band and clasp rubbing against a bracelet of white plastic stones and the varsity patch on my grey jacket, a strong serif M outlined in white, as I assembled three good stones from the ballast on the train tracks, placing them carefully on the concrete base of the steel overhead lines.

From behind, we can also see Danielle shifting her hair from her face, she also has a varsity patch, the letter C on the rear of her blue beanie, black nail polish and an ex-military jacket, from the German army reserve. We remember to blur Piero's face in this shot. Thereafter he is wearing a black bandana with a white face drawn on the front, but it is hard to make out. As well as

bandanas, now everyone is wearing gloves, but Boris is struggling to operate the controls on his Canon camera, and so removes the glove on his left hand.

We've cut the fence, and our third friend is pointing through the hole, his camouflage jacket makes sense against the long grass that grows around the edge of the tracks, where the workers can only access to cut it once or twice a season. The sun is still low in the sky. Jump to another mission where our contact is on a white iPhone, while we wait in our black North Face jackets. We would never take phones to a yard but here we are just getting an update on the yard situation and the security patterns. Are we right to go?

A guy climbs over a solid metal fence in a woodland, the sky almost blotted out by green leaves and where his black gloves touch the top of the fence there's a foot-high MOSES tag. In black gloves, Piero shrugs in front of a plain security fence as a train passes, the temporary kind, with no razor wire, electric charges or sensors, just a plain old fence that we can walk through almost without breaking stride. Shouldn't the train be stopping here? Isn't there a driver changeover, a timetable lag, a disabled passenger, a cigarette break? This should be our time, but I've got my feet crossed waiting and Danielle is rolling her own cigarette.

But then we are in, we've cut the fence, Danielle climbs ahead of me. The cans are in a box inside a cotton grocery bag from Carrefour. Now it's nearly midday and inside the station, where trains are waiting for the afternoon peak, we climb through between the carriages of the stationary train, stepping on the black coupling. Double back, we are in the park from the start and are lifting up the grates to the ventilation tunnels below, it takes two of us.

Outside another yard, Piero lies prone on the concrete, craning to see under a set of metal gates, the toes of his battered Nikes are pushing down into the dirt, his abs are straining and he's still has most of his head wrapped in a cotton bandana. As he looks and listens, a line of grass is pushing up through the concrete and the signs of renovation, a surveyor's yellow peg and a stack of temporary fencing, offer only basic cover. Now the sun is overhead.

Next he fingers the paint covered latch of the train workshops and we are inside, crouching, Danielle is peeling the lens cap off her Sony and Boris points his Canon at me, I've shed my jacket in the park, there's product placement galore, not just the bandanas but I'm wearing a Griffers T-shirt, with Boris' letters spelling "My Only Weakness is a List of Crimes."

Quick night shot, it's so dark the auto ISO on the camera has risen above 3200 so the sky is super pixelated, a mumble of blues mixed with pink and green streaks, Cyan and Magenta, not how the sky really looked at all, but the three figures, two with hoods, sitting atop the fence are all under-exposed. Now a

strange shot, one of us grasping the ankle of another guiding their foot into an invisible toe-hold in the security fence, a gesture reminiscent of adolescence, when you can't physically carry the weight of a friend but can offer only reassurance.

Now the whole scene becomes more cinematic, building to the most extraordinary moment. First, the focus on the Canon goes haywire, stuck on the clean subway train in the underground siding, stuck on its yellow livery and the distant lights but Giovanni has turned back to Boris and he is pointing, the three of us – Giovanni, Danielle and me – have slid out of focus, we're like pasty figures on a green screen, dropped into the background. As the MC rhymes "tasers" with "lasers", Giovanni is gesturing to Boris to be quiet. I put my hand out to indicate we should pause in the tunnel and watch Piero scout ahead on the left. There's no third rail. The tracks aren't live. It's Europe, not America.

Where the impulse of the February Bourgeois Revolution was to impound the Tsar's train, when the Bolsheviks came to power in October they set out a radical program of putting the countries rolling stock in the service of the Revolution. A year before Lenin would issue a decree nationalising the film industry and handing control of all film production to the People's Commissariat of Education, or Narkompros, the first Bolshevik whole train, named after Lenin himself, pulled out of the station on August 13, 1918. These so-called Agit-trains were painted with colourful graphic images, including the names of the trains, such as "Red East", "Soviet Caucasus" and "Red Cossack."

The first Agit-train departs less than a year after the Bolsheviks had gained power and at a moment when the Revolution was still under threat on many fronts from the White Russian and counter-revolutionary forces. Specially built armoured trains were instrumental in the early fighting and Lenin has sent Stalin to Baku to apply terror tactics to prevent attacks on trains moving through the Northern Caucasus. Perversely like the rapid appearance of home satellite dishes on the roofs of Chinese cities in the 1990s, the expansion of the Russian train network under the Tsar laid the seeds of Revolution, showing the peasants who travelled to the cities for the first time that the Tsar was no God: just a man.

Painted outside with bright murals, the first Agit-train housed actors, a printing press and a film crew. Later Agit-trains would include a film production house, with a laboratory and editing suites. Painters sized up the train carriages the same way that graffiti writers would do in New York 50 years later. On the exterior of one carriage, a top-to-bottom figure unfolds a cinema screen while at his feet the now familiar silhouette of film canisters, though with the archaic three holes rather than the American six-holed reels.

The experience of train travel, where trains unspooled across the tracks and the carriages were edited together, linked and montaged like frames of a film, was a powerful experience for a generation of Soviet directors. On the first Agit-train was Edward Tissé, a military cameraman who would become one of the most important camera operators in Soviet cinema. In 1925, Tissé would work with Sergei Eisenstein, shooting landmark films such as *Strike* and *Battleship Potemkin*.

Lev Kuleshov and Dziga Vertov also travelled across Russia on the early Agit-trains. Born Denis Kaufman, is it said that Vertov chose his new name to reflect the clicking sounds of movie cameras, but his name could equally be an echo of the sonic patterns of train travel. When the first Agit-train departed, Vertov was 22 years old. The experience of shooting film in documentary and battle conditions, rather than in the studio, would mark much of post-revolutionary Soviet cinema. For Eisenstein, the pinnacle of cinema was the collision of meaning created by conflict: montage as train crash.

So, for those in the future, to be clear: *Grifter's Code 5* was a slickly edited video of graffiti writers in Milan made in 2013, continuing the tradition of train painting that came to prominence in New York in the 1970s,

but it has other roots in the events of the Russian Revolution one hundred years earlier, when the Bolsheviks seized the Russian train network, including the Tsar's personal train and pressed the rolling stock into service for the Revolution, a gesture that is little known today but had far-reaching implications for a generation of Soviet film-makers, who would pioneer the cinematic language that would make the pounding disjunctions of *Grifter's Code* possible.

Among the many threads that link these stories is the connection between the experience of train travel and cinema but also the motif of the two-headed eagle, a symbol of Empire, already present at Peterhof station when the Tsar's train was reclaimed for the people, and inserted by Good Guy Boris in the opening frame of *Grifter's Code 5*.

The centenary of the Agit-trains reminds us of the train on which we are all now travelling: one wooden deep blue carriage from the Tsar's personal train joined to a brightly painted Bolshevik carriage loaded with film equipment joined to a classic New York whole car (Dondi, Seen, Blade) joined to Boris' personal carriage, painted top-to-bottom in chrome, with his own Manifesto, ready to become the soundtrack of his own propaganda film... *Fuck Being Polite*.

Lachlan MacDowall lectures in Screen and Cultural Studies at the University of Melbourne, where he is also a member of the Research Unit in Public Cultures. He has presented and published widely on the history and aesthetics of graffiti, street art and urban informality. His current projects examine new methods of graffiti research using photography, writing and data and his book *Instafame: Graffiti and Street Art in the Instagram Era* will be published by Intellect Books in 2019.

Blunting broken windows: Rio de Janeiro's Olympic dreams

Raphael Soifer, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro

***Blunting Broken Windows: Rio de Janeiro's Olympic Dreams** is an excerpt from my 2017 doctoral thesis in Urban and Regional Planning at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ, Brazil), in which I seek to approximate the heteroglossic experiences of bodies meeting in the city through textual and thematic juxtaposition. As such, I have departed from standard academic writing and approached the work as a performance text, utilizing protest chants, popular songs, and personal narratives – as well as citations from theoretical essays and newspaper articles – in order to investigate relations between memory, territory, and corporeality. Throughout the work, I switch between different fonts and formatting styles to indicate different authorial voices.*

*In addition to serving as a form of auto-ethnography, **Blunting Broken Windows** is an exercise in self-translation: I wrote the original in Portuguese, which I learned as an adult, and I am only now beginning to translate it into my native English, blending further the text's investigation of urban wandering and personal interrogation.*

1.

**August 22, 2016
Olympic Boulevard, Port Zone, Rio de Janeiro**

I walk down the Olympic Boulevard with the ghost of Francisco Pereira Passos, the self-proclaimed "Tropical Haussman," mayor of Rio de Janeiro from 1902 to 1906 who expelled tens of thousands of people from their homes to try and make the city look a little bit more like Paris.

It's a cold and rainy Monday, a day declared a public holiday so as to mark the end of the 2016 Olympic Games, to ease the first stage of its slow decomposition, and to facilitate the mass exit of athletes, coaches, bureaucrats, and tourists.

Olympic Ghost Methodology:

In order to carry out research with a ghost at your side and enter into a dream you would prefer not to be a part of, all you need is a combination of basic historical knowledge

(no matter how incomplete);

a minimally active imagination

(something that becomes more difficult to exercise during mega-events that go out of their way to sell experiences that can override any imagination, whether individual or collective);

*a sort of Brechtian distancing;
and resigned patience.*

(Big sigh).

Mr. Pereira Passos and I place ourselves here on the Boulevard as observers rather than participants, an identification that the Ghost Mayor's invisibility might help to reinforce. But that distinction doesn't count for much along this giant, pseudo-public promenade, in which to observe is to participate: rambling or wandering among painted walls and thematic houses pausing to pose for selfies and to feel the mega-scale of it all is the base-level involvement of everyone passing through.



The "Boulevard" is a model stretch of 3.2 kilometers

[T]he biggest Olympic live site in the history of the Olympic Games...
(PREFEITURA DO RIO 2016a)

that joins Rio's Port Zone to downtown's Praça XV in front of Guanabara Bay's celebrated "superbacterias." It's zealously watched over by a combination of the Municipal Guard, Military Police, National Guard, Marine Police, and Army Police, as well as Army soldiers holding semi-automatic rifles

...with more than 100 concerts, cultural and sports attractions. (ibid)

Such as, for example, a *Bungee Jump* sponsored by Nissan, a hot-air balloon sponsored by Skol Beer, a maquette of the city of Rio de Janeiro sponsored by Lego, and

an Olympic space totally focused on young people (*ibid*)

sponsored, of course, by Coca-Cola.

With the dead mayor's ghost by my side, I walk through this *live site*

(*which, somehow, is left without italics when it's written in Portuguese*)

trying to understand what, exactly, a live site could be.

The designation seems to have been used, at most, once before, during the 2012 London Olympics.

As far as I can tell, a live site is a sort of fusion between a closed street and an open-air shopping mall;

it's a theoretically public space that has been highly patronized, regulated, and that – at least hypothetically – is highly profitable

(*which is to say that, even if the site itself isn't profitable just yet, it's at least capable of generating or inspiring future profits*).

So a *live site* is a concretization of the speculative Dream of an Olympic City.

The ex-mayor understands a little bit about this concretization. Stifling laughter, he opens a ghost newspaper from his days:

...to all of us, this construction of a port, and this radiant promise of long avenues and ample quays sanitizing and beautifying the city still seems to be a dream.

But it is not a dream. Our generation can give thanks to the heavens for the grace it has been conceded in initiating the regeneration of Brazil.

(*O Malho*, "Renascimento", 13/6/1903, em Del Brenna (1985, p. 68))

The almost euphoric smile that I envision on the imagined face of the Ghost Mayor mixes with dozens of smiles from the portraits that cover the façades of three buildings in the middle of the Boulevard. The only figure that can't manage to join in is a cutout boy on the side of a blue building, slouching among the portraits.

The boy is surrounded by dozens of broken windows. Jagged glass is all around him: above his head, at his feet, behind his back, at the same level as his sad, contemplative eyes. But these sharp edges are nearly hidden, overwhelmed by smiling faces.



Broken windows and smiling portraits also cover the two beige buildings on either side of the blue one. But it's only on the blue building – right at the boy's eye level – that a yellow plastic banner, crookedly hung amidst all the broken glass, advertises the building as being for rent. It's also worth mentioning that the dozens of families who formed a squatters' settlement known as Casarão Azul

(the Big Blue House)

were expelled from the blue building in 2009, because they didn't fit into the Dream of an Olympic City being applied to this Port District.

...unfortunately, the building that housed the settlement is still here, intact.

They haven't moved a single brick, it's exactly as it was. There was a big rush to make the residents leave, but it's still here, intact. And one of those residents is living in a space that could be considered a tenement, in a nine square meter room that he lives in with his wife and their six children. So it's very unfortunate, isn't it? They're waiting for this space to become even more valuable through real estate speculation, and the former residents are living in completely precarious situations.

(Santos 2016)

The eviction of Casarão Azul produced a gap that no public authorities had any rush to fill; according to the speculative logic of the Dream of an Olympic City, decorating a building's façade can be much more lucrative than actually inhabiting it.

At the same time, for Casarão Azul – and for the majority of buildings along the Olympic Boulevard – the projected and imagined potential of an Olympic City is worth much more than the physical reality produced and experienced by the people who once lived there. The decorations on the building's façade – especially the cutout of the unsmiling boy – provide the only possible clue about the building's past.

A stable neighborhood of families who care for their homes, mind each other's children, and confidently frown on unwanted intruders can change, in a few years or even a few months, to an inhospitable and frightening jungle. A piece of property is abandoned, weeds grow up, a window is smashed.
(Wilson and Kelling 1982, p. 3)

These days, any City that Dreams of Being Olympic must necessarily dream of following New York's go-get-'em, Zero Tolerance lead; it dreams of following "America's mayor"

and Donald Trump's personal attorney

Rudolph Giuliani, of applying the famous "Broken Windows" model of policing that supposedly saved New York from urban decay in the 1990s, and of Giuliani-fying itself. The Olympic Dream attempts to remake the city, turning it into a center of wealth not by combating poverty, but by crushing the poor. Giuliani-fication naturalizes ideas of cause and effect in crime, singling out the most convenient suspects.

Here, in Giuliani-fied Rio de Janeiro, repressing small crimes and expelling the people potentially responsible for them is meant to turn the city into something vaguely similar to a dreamed-of First World. But the Giuliani-fication process behind the Dream of an Olympic City inverts values that – in other circumstances and other contexts – it claims as being its own.

Within the Dream of an Olympic City that takes on a concrete physical form on the Boulevard,
the empty building of the former Casarão Azul,
the yellow sign that announces the possibility of renting it,
and even the broken windows themselves all become signs of PROGRESS.
Here, the very absence of families taking care of the buildings they live in is what makes the neighborhood supposedly stable.
The presence of these families would be more than an inconvenience; it would be enough to transform the neighborhood into an inhospitable jungle.

The problem with broken windows is not the jagged glass in and of itself, but rather the people that these shards might represent, instigate, and inspire. These shard-people have bodies that carry memories of an entire crushing process of the establishment of power.

Traits attributed to shard-people:

Bodies with dark skin.

Bodies that speak in ways that are said to be less intelligible than the norm.

Bodies with low incomes.

In other words, all the types of bodies that have traditionally inhabited Rio de Janeiro's Port Zone.

But once these shard-people are removed, the windows themselves can remain broken. The graffiti can spread out as a signal of achievement of all the Games' grandiosity, of a spirit that calls itself more and more international.

There's a continuum of disorder. Obviously, murder and graffiti are two vastly different crimes. But they are part of the same continuum, and a climate that tolerates one is more likely to tolerate the other. (Giuliani1998)

This continuum of disorder stands out when a shard-person produces the graffiti. But the continuum of the façades of the mostly empty buildings of a City that Dreams of Being Olympic is completely different.

The largest graffiti of the world is in Gamboa. The 2500 square meter panel is signed by the artist Eduardo Kobra, who has works in more than 20 countries. The artwork is called "Etnias," and it was inspired by the Olympic Rings representing the five continents (Revista Eventos 2016).

(In Brazil, North and South America are usually considered to be two parts of the same continent. Here, Antarctica is just being ignored).

In order to reverse the continuum of disorder, a City that Dreams of Being Olympic must, first and foremost, disappear the kinds of bodies that, much more than any action –

*whether breaking windows, painting graffiti, or –
following Giuliani's logic –
murdering –*

might recall the sort of inhospitable jungle that's so frightening to the Bodies Taken to be Sufficiently Olympic:

Standards for Bodies Taken to be Sufficiently Olympic

Bodies with acceptably light skin,

*with exceptions made for mega-specialized athletes;
tourists from sufficiently distant places
(in this case, São Paulo is good enough);
bodies that are exotic and two-dimensional enough to be painted on façades,
like the so-called "ethnic" faces in Eduardo Kobra's graffiti;
or beer vendors.*

Bodies with sufficient income to walk around the Boulevard;

and, apparently most importantly, bodies without any plan of hanging around here, unless that hanging around brings sufficiently Olympian investments with it.

These are bodies that don't need to be relegated to footnotes.
These are bodies that are basically like mine.

Here, in the Dream of the Olympic City
we solve disorder mostly through forced absence.

Here, in the Dream of the Olympic City
we don't even need to fix broken windows;
blunting them is already enough.

Here, we resolve abandonment with a simple application of two-dimensional
outsiders' faces made out of ink or of paper.

I begin to understand this Giulianified Dream of an Olympic City as a project that,
above all, takes very good care of façades.

2.

During the whole month of August, a Google Translate ad campaign spreads itself
ubiquitously throughout Rio de Janeiro,
on those light-up signs that form the city's more developed bus stops
presenting, in languages from throughout the entire world,
tips and recommendations of a so-called generalized carioca culture:

To say hi to 5 people, you need 10 kisses.
Para dizer oi a cinco pessoas, você precisa de 10 beijos.

“Parada” signifie beaucoup de choses.
“Parada” significa muitas coisas.

(“Parada” means a lot of different things).

للطف يولد اللطف
Gentileza gera gentileza

(Kindness begets kindness).

Beleza can mean yes, cool, deal, and OK.
Beleza pode significar sim, legal, fechado e tudo bem.

Here, in the middle of the Boulevard, at the core of the Dream, these translated
cariocisms play at being both more specifically local and more historically
meaningful.

В Порто Maravilha, улицы наш музей
No Porto Maravilha, as ruas são nosso museu.

(In the Marvelous Port, the streets are our museum).



In the City That Dreams of Being Olympic, memory – like the city itself – winds up becoming just another product. And even though it's intangible, its packaging is very clearly defined and maintained. Memory is another speculatively profitable brand, a brand that establishes and propagates itself through the absence of shard-people, and their bodies that have already been marked or branded. These shard-people were expelled on all sides of the Olympic Boulevard; in other parts of the city, they were often made absent through lethal erasures.

December 17, 2012
Rua Riachuelo 46, Lapa

It was nighttime when I passed a group of arty-looking folks painting the façade of the building at Rua Riachuelo 46, where 40 families had lived in the Carlos Marighella squat until they were evicted in September 2010.

(Carlos Marighella was a revolutionary communist guerilla assassinated by the Brazilian Armed Forces in 1969; he has become one of the country's foremost leftist martyrs).

On the graying walls of the hollow building – which city workers had sealed with bricks and cement to prevent a new “invasion” – the artists hung enormous God's Eyes and painted a single prompt over and over in enormous letters

FREE YOUR DREAMS
FREE YOUR DREAMS
FREE YOUR DREAMS

Under these words, in slightly smaller letters, another phrase repeated itself dozens of times. One line was left blank, so that whoever was passing by would be able to fill in their own answer.

My dream is _____.
 My dream is _____.

Five years before the inauguration of the Olympic Boulevard, the graffiti that used to be so threatening was already showing its clear utility to the City that Dreams of Being Olympic. On the façade of this former squat, it asked for words in sentences that would remain incomplete without the intervention of people who come from somewhere else, words to fill in empty spaces that have been left blank.

(Or, in Portuguese, "left white." In point of fact, expelling the inhabitants of Carlos Marighella – or of any downtown squat in Rio de Janeiro – tends to make the empty space much whiter; which is to say, less Black, with fewer dark-skinned bodies. In spite of any painted interventions that might come with them, these expulsions always make the buildings less colorful).

Once the shard-people have been taken away by force, the spaces they once inhabited can only be filled in by the dreams of those who pass through without any intention of staying. The city-brand inverts itself within the dream, a dream that's easily sold, easily packaged, and

crucially

easily forgotten; it becomes a collective dream of leaving our own marks on the city. And so the dreams of people who have never even entered the Carlos Marighella occupation sprout from its façade like playful stamps that attest to the decisive erasure of its past.

Like the Casarão Azul occupation, Carlos Marighella has also been empty for more than six years.



3.

August 21, 2016
Olympic Boulevard, Port District

I walk alone through the Boulevard on the last night of the Games.

*(The ghost of Francisco Pereira Passos might be present;
he probably is, but I'm not the one invoking him right now).*

Everywhere I turn, this Rio de Janeiro that dreams of being Olympic
dresses itself up,
marks itself, to show how it's become a global destination par excellence,
to prove its highly international character.
The game of joining up with brands,
of being marked by brands,
or of leaving one's own mark on these brands
is moving ahead at full steam.

*In this game, of course, the city itself is the main brand
and the principle marker.*

Aside from the forcibly **mega** scale of activities sponsored by the planet's biggest brands, there are other forces that call themselves every bit as international, even though they operate on much a smaller

(but still fully authorized)

scale:

all down the Boulevard, there are *food trucks*

*(always described that way, in English,
thereby denying any possible similarity to the traditional carioca "podrex,"
a cheap fast food truck affectionately nicknamed for its supposedly rotten offerings)*

selling so-called typical foods from so-called exotic places,
ranging from Mexican tacos
to Belgian chips
to American ice cream
to a pizza that tries hard to call itself Italian.

Anti-methodological footnote:

In my zeal to establish myself as an observer who shows my engagement by not participating in the Boulevard's so-called attractions, I don't spend any money during my perambulations. Therefore, I don't sample any of the offerings from these food trucks.

On the other side of the Boulevard, a food truck on Praça XV describes itself simply as Subúrbio, a reference to poor and working-class communities on the city's periphery. It's like gentrification distilled into a single vehicle and a few sandwiches, a gourmet, exoticized version of burgers you could buy elsewhere for half the price.

At least that's how I imagine it. To be honest, I don't even bother to check out the menu; this is due to my vegetarianism, as well as to my fatigue and my revulsion. I don't claim that these are strictly methodological, but they are all undoubtedly critical components of my approach to research.

The reverse

but equally important

side of this branding through which the city receives the whole world involves showing the whole world as being marked by the City That Dreams of Being Olympic.

In this other classic synecdoche-game, making the part stand for the whole is just as important as making the whole stand for the part. So it's not just that Rio de Janeiro is the world; the world is also Rio de Janeiro.

This sentiment shouts itself in florescent lights just a few short meters away from Casarão Azul, where a literally electrified and illuminated kiosk sponsored by O Globo newspaper promises to put

YOU ON THE FRONT PAGE

under the headline

The Whole World is Carioca
The Whole World is Carioca
The Whole World is Carioca

To be carioca, in this case, joins identity to consuming; belonging to the City That Dreams of Being Olympic demands a *buy-in*, a desire that has less to do with purchasing specific products, and more with an acceptance of a speculativeness that shows itself off all down the Boulevard: accepting the possibility that all of this will pay, and pay off well; accepting the passability carried by certain individual bodies; and, above all, accepting the absence of shard-people, those

mostly carioca

bodies that have been hidden or removed in order for the Dream to continue.

Again, I should emphasize here that my gringo whiteness and/or my white gringo-ness allows me to place myself within the Dream without any authority attempting to remove me. In other words: I am part of this "whole world" that's free to consume carioca-ness.

Of course, the physical space of this carioca belonging-dream doesn't include the entire city. A couple blocks away from the Olympic Boulevard, the streets are basically impassable, filled with debris from demolished houses, upturned cobblestones, and unfinished light rail tracks, broken pipes and split wires floating in pools of raw sewage.

Even if those torn-up streets and the sewage don't end the Dream outright, they reinforce the flimsiness of the façades that form a sort of border between the City That Dreams of Being Olympic and the Rio de Janeiro that this Dream tries so hard to cover up, erase, or push out. Behind the Boulevard, or even within the Boulevard – actually, throughout the whole city – you can still see the dust, still feel a sort of haunting. And you don't even have to know how to name it in order to feel it.

The less you speak to Cariocas, as natives of Rio are known, the more you will enjoy this place. (Segal 2016)

The *New York Times'* advice is as precise as it is willfully obnoxious. Because the City That Dreams of Being Olympic also dreams of erasing any other traces of lives that might interfere with its ambitions.



Glossary

Carioca – native to Rio de Janeiro.

Military Police – the “brute squad” of the police force, responsible for most on-the-ground actions throughout the city (such as street-level arrests and incursions into favelas)

Municipal Guard – a sort of auxiliary police squad, responsible for basic law-and-order initiatives, whose members do not carry firearms.

Praça XV – a major plaza on Guanabara Bay in downtown Rio de Janeiro

Raphael (Raphi) Soifer is a performance artist, researcher, and mess-maker from the United States. Since 2010, he has been based in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, where he investigates the aesthetics of power and protest in urban spaces. He is a member and collaborator of various street art collectives in Rio, and holds a doctorate in Urban and Regional Planning from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro.

raphisoifer.com

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Unexpected beauty in urban decay

Jonna Tolonen
University of Lapland

The barrio, or 'neighbourhood', of El Cabanyal in Valencia, Spain, is a historic fishing quarter from the 13th century next to the Mediterranean coast. El Cabanyal, with its colourful art nouveau houses, is an officially protected historical zone – but in recent decades it has suffered an absolute abandonment of public investment, leading to deep degradation in its streets. Due to a history of irregularities with running water and rubbish collection, an absence of social services and restoration projects, and a growing number of drug-related crimes, many residents have moved away from the area. The streets are now full of abandoned houses: doorways are sealed with cement or bricks, building facades have deteriorated, and the walls are used as canvases for graffiti and street art.

However, El Cabanyal is now experiencing a process of gentrification. In line with Sorando and Ardura's (2016) characterisation of the stages of gentrification, El Cabanyal has already gone through an abandonment stage. It is now embarking on an era of regeneration, in which a series of public interventions contribute to redefining the area, and the neighbourhood's image begins to change. Since the City of Valencia commenced a major restoration of the houses, parks and streets, and private real estate developers have moved in, the social character of El Cabanyal has started to change. New people – both tourists and locals – are now exploring the area.

Unexpected beauty in urban decay is an ongoing photo series that seeks to explore Spanish neighbourhoods that are being altered or demolished to make way for urban development. The images show the last moments of these places before they are transformed through the process of gentrification.



Figure 1. Due to hardly any formal traffic management in the area, traffic signs are a rare sight in El Cabanyal.



Figure 2. The narrow streets are perfect places to practice artistic skills.



Figure 3. El Cabanyal is home to about 20,000 people living in 12,000 houses (Ayuntamiento de València, 2017). In recent decades, about 4,000 inhabitants have left the area (Navarro Castelló, 2017), leaving behind houses that look like this: one entrance is closed with cement; the other with locks.



Figure 4. Violencia es trabajar sin contrato. 'Working without a contract is violence.'



Figure 5. Abandoned house. The window is sealed with bricks from the inside. On the wall, someone has written: *Te amo*, 'I love you', in white paint. Sixty percent of the houses in the area are over 50 years old, and during the last twenty years around 200 houses have been demolished (Hervás Más, 2017).



Figure 6. The owner has blocked the doors, windows and air vents with heavy layers of cement.



Figure 7. Vaguely buffed penis.



Figure 8. Cat siesta. Resulting from inefficient rubbish collections, some parts of the streets have been turned into DIY rubbish points.



Figure 9. *DECAY REAL ESTATE* by Valencian artist Are You Dead?, who has been painting since 2013 and is 'obsessed with decay' (Pardo, 2014).



Figure 10. There seems to be no easy resolution to the prolonged urban and social crisis in El Cabanyal. Faustino Villora, the spokesman for the association *Salvem El Cabanyal*, 'Save El Cabanyal', has said: 'There are families who have resisted the harassment of the previous municipal government for 18 years and now, following the hope that a new government brought, when they thought the solution was here, they find that life in their neighbourhood is getting even worse' (Vázquez, 2017).



Figure 11. Graffiti in a beam of a shadow. Artist unknown.

Jonna Tolonen is a photographer and a postdoctoral researcher at the Faculty of Art and Design at the University of Lapland, Finland. Her works examine the intersections of street, politics and society. Jonna's favourite neighbourhoods to photograph are El Cabanyal in Valencia, Lavapiés in Madrid, and La Isleta in Las Palmas.

Notes

- 1 All photographs taken by the author in El Cabanyal, Valencia, Spain in 2016 and 2017.
- 2 Spanish-English translations by the author.

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Kurskaya Wall

Oleg Kuznetsov 2018



The current focus of my artistic practice is at the intersection of the studio and urban space. Such an approach gives rise to a sense of disorientation and radical impermanence, which is caused by endlessly repeated leaps from one context to another. However, this duality also acts as a catalyst.

I began my journey with graffiti, but through the protracted experience of creating infinitely monotonous forms this type of creative practice began to feel inadequate. Nevertheless, the works I continue to perform in public space often seem like 'street art' because of the use of materials and methods I adopt.

In the beginning of summer 2015, I commenced a programme of work that sought to 'erase' graffiti in public space – without a permit. Equipped with a high visibility worker's vest I started 'cleaning the city' from 'vulgar' inscriptions and 'hooligan' graffiti. The Moscow wall at the Kursky railway station became a place that I engaged with for almost half a year. The photographs of the wall are presented in chronological order (above – unpredictable aesthetics, from below – a buff¹). Close-up images have been added for clarity.

1 A 'buff' refers to the act of graffiti removal

The removal of graffiti by an unauthorized 'employee' seems like a provocation, especially as this work is produced by a former graffiti artist. The answer to the question "Why?" is also ambiguous, like the question itself. If the inscriptions are not buffed with an 'artistic' intention, they will still be painted over. Perhaps the answer to the question is, then, "Why not?"

A paradox arises here. On the one hand, the 'artistic' buff helps the city to clean the space from the 'visual garbage', fulfilling the function of workers. On the other hand, the action itself is illegal, which refers to the traditions of the same graffiti. The only criteria for recognition of my work as mark making with artistic intent is the colour of the paint used, which does not match the colour of the wall. This distinctive feature often aroused suspicion among passersby, who repeatedly documented my graffiti removing process on the cameras of their smartphones.



21/05/2015









23/05/2015



28/05/2015







Kurskaya Wall



04/06/2015



09/06/2015







Kurskaya Wall



01/11/2015



Interviews

Talks

Aesthetic destruction: At home with Ian Strange

Interview by Jan Zahl
Arts Editor at
Stavanger Aftenblad.



Home, Ian Strange, Stavanger 2017, Photograph ©Brian Tallman.

Ian Strange (previously known as Kid Zoom) is a multidisciplinary artist whose work explores architecture, space and the home, alongside broader themes of disenfranchisement within the urban environment. His practice includes large-scale multifaceted projects resulting in photography, sculpture, installation, site-specific interventions, film works, documentary works and exhibitions. His studio practice includes painting and drawing as well as on-going research and archiving projects. Ian's work is held in private and public collections including The National Gallery of Victoria; Art Gallery of South Australia; Art Gallery of Western Australia, and the Canterbury Museum. He currently lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.

Jan Zahl: You only started reflecting on home once you'd left your own home, when you got to New York. Why didn't you reflect on your own home when you were home?

Ian Strange: When you are in something, you don't have that perspective. I grew up in Perth, Western Australia. For me that was a very isolated place, particularly in my early adolescence. It was kind of just pre-internet, so it really felt like, as an artist, you couldn't escape – or really, you had to leave to actually see the world and be an artist. So, I was really defined in the negative space of the place I grew up in. I wanted to escape this suburban upbringing and it was something that I didn't want to make work about. I wanted to go to these urban centres. And I think the moment – you know, be careful what you wish for! – the moment I got to the States was the moment I was thinking, "well what's unique about me?" and "what kind of work do I really want to make?"

That was when I started reflecting on my origins in suburbia – what is that suburban angst, that suburban detachment that maybe motivated me to paint graffiti in the first place, that made me want to react to the environment in that way as an adolescent, and then

that motivated me to want to leave. It made me want to react to my environment in that way. That for me, was a starting point, it was a fertile ground, for a more personal exploration that I was interested in taking.

And going back to Perth – growing up there – how did you end up doing graffiti in the first place?

It was high school and all my friends were into skateboarding and riding bikes round at night, and a couple of my friends got into graffiti, and they knew that I was good at art, so they took me out and I started being their lookout for them, and then I started painting. And then very quickly my ability to be able to draw and paint translated into aerosol – and then I just got completely hooked and really competitive – to try to be the best I could be with that medium.

Martyn Reed has described you as "the embodiment of the development of the street art culture." Because you started out on urban walls, with tags and graffiti, and then you've moved up to being invited to art institutions – and now you work with huge teams on major projects. There's a development there – is that how you see it yourself?



Tag on Bear (self portrait of the artist straight fronting). Ian Strange (Kia Zoom)
This City Will Eat Me Alive, New York 2010. Photograph ©Jaime Rojo/B&A (www.brooklynstreetart.com)

I think it would be dangerous to say I was representative of a movement, or where a movement was going. For me, that was my personal journey. The DIY attitude that comes from painting graffiti, and the fact that you just get out and you make something – and if you can't get something done through the front door, you go round the back door. You do it illegally if you have to – you beg, borrow, steal – do it in a guerrilla way, if you have to.

That's something I take into all my projects and art practices. If you need to get something done, you just work out how get it done. If you have to do it by jumping a fence, you do it by jumping a fence. That attitude – in the same way that the DIY punk movement inspired a bunch of artists, and skateboarding inspired a bunch of artists – it builds an ethos, and that's something I definitely take with me, into my work.

I still spray, I still mark walls, I still use paint to antagonise this object of the home. That for me still has that ethos of trying to antagonise people, aesthetically. Because I'm not destroying these houses – you know, you can still live in these houses (OK, not the one I burned down) but for the most part, it's an aesthetic destruction. And so, if we're thinking about this, why is it that aesthetically shifting something is seen as destructive?

And that's really interesting – it has a relationship with graffiti as well – if there's this big mark across a house – why is this object so sacred? Why is this object held up with such esteem? And this allows you to question it

by antagonising with these markings. This is definitely something I have taken from my graffiti background.

“I wanted to cut these homes and split them open... and draw in the space with light.”

In 2013, Ian produced a collaborative work in Christchurch with cinematographer Alun Bollinger (Lord of the Rings, Heavenly Creatures, The Frighteners). These film and photography-based works incorporated suburban houses slated for demolition post the devastating 2011 earthquake that demolished 16,000 homes. FINAL ACT is an “emotive archive”, and also a continuation of Ian's exploration of home as a quotidian symbol of safety and security.

What happened in Christchurch was in response to an extreme situation – but at the same time, did this provide an extreme possibility for you, as an artist?

Yes. The point was, actually that I could have gone out and done whatever I wanted, but the process was really collaborative. So, during the earthquake, one of the main buildings where people were killed was a TV station there. A lot of the people in the film industry who worked with me on that project, personally knew people who had died in that quake. So, there was this aspect of the project that was about engagement with the community and developing the work with them, and being part of a team – that was making work within the community, that was then exhibited in the community. There was a level of catharsis there.



Number Thirty-four: Ian Strange, 2013. Photograph © Ian Strange.

Harvard Street. Ian Strange, 2012. Photograph © Ian Strange.



It's not like my previous work – where there are big red X's painted on houses and black dots painted on houses – and markings on them that look quite aggressive.

That's not the kind of work that I could make in Christchurch at that time. But absolutely, there is definitely this aspect of possibility in the houses there as well – as a raw material to work with.

How do you do this in practice? Coming to a place – how do you work with the local community?

About 8 months before I went in to film I did a scout trip – I met with all the community leaders there, community volunteer groups, government organisations, everyone – before I could say yes to working with the Rise festival and the Canterbury Museum on it. Because I didn't want to be seen as an outsider coming in and exploiting the situation. And I wanted to make sure that I'd be welcome, and also that I could make something that would be contributing.

Overwhelmingly I was told by people that "this is three years on." There was a sense of disaster exhaustion. There's actually a tracked level of exhaustion that kicks in after three years. And people said, "this is the time to make this work." These houses were just getting demolished. So, they wanted to see something positive made with them.

The process of creating that work was about pre-production. Then being on the ground for 2 months, getting buy in from everybody and getting access to the houses. But that slow process and getting the permissions, means that you bring everyone

on board with you. Someone like Alun Bollinger, the cinematographer. I met him on my first trip, and we started talking about a collaboration then. So, it grows, and he brought his community with him. It became something that grew organically.

You work with 'home' – and potentially painful and complicated issues – in this case, a disaster, in the US, the rust belt, and the consequences of the financial crash. But yet when I google "Ian Strange + controversy" nothing shows up – is everybody just happy about everything?

The way that I go into communities is with community leaders and existing community groups. So, there are artists who have social practice – like Swoon – who are committing to a city and will stay in that city. As an artist, I am not someone who is going to go into a city and stay there – so the way that I can do that is by working with existing art organisations and community groups – who already have those relationships and want me to come into those cities, to work. I've had a lot of houses that I've had access to but as soon as I've scouted them and met with the community – and taken the temperature of the community – there's no way I'd go in there, because I wouldn't be welcomed.

There are places in Detroit where I've worked which are really hard hit neighbourhoods. We spent weeks fixing those houses up first. So, I'll go in with a team of 10 people, and they'll meet us because we are mowing the lawn and fixing up this house that's been dilapidated for 7-8 years – they are just happy something is happening with the house. For the most part, they want that house demolished – but the city hasn't demolished it. We are fixing the house

up, we are creating an artwork on it, and then it gets demolished soon afterwards.

But there are other places where I work with really affluent neighbourhoods, and that's probably where I've had the most controversy. I painted a house on Lake Michigan, in Ohio, which was this big three and a half storey house, in this really rich neighbourhood, and the neighbours lost their minds – they did not like a crew in there, they didn't want anyone filming – we did everything we normally do, but they just did not want us there. I think they were just angry that the house was being demolished. But this house was being demolished because the land was worth more than the house. The house was getting demolished to build an even bigger house on that block.

As an artist, would you like there to be different kinds of reactions? When you're talking about the communities it sounds almost therapeutic for them, and that's one way that art can work, but do you want to be provocative as well?

Absolutely. There is something that has shifted over the years of me making this work. I'd started working with houses, and I thought of ideas in the studio, and

I'd say, "this is what I want to make" and I'd go into communities with a really aesthetic idea of, "I want to create this minimalist abstract work directly onto this house." But then, in the process of doing that, of course, there is always this community collaboration. And I thought, "well, that's process, but what I am trying to do is get a photo. And what I'm trying to do is get a film." And that, for the first few years of making these projects – right up to FINAL ACT – I thought about it as, "I am trying to get an image that is arresting, that is challenging, to our ideas of the home and the sense of safety it represents." It's this elevated object, and I wanted to create something with film or photography that is an attack – or which questions – this sense of safety. And that I wanted as a photo to challenge people. But I did not want to go in and antagonise neighbourhoods while I was making it.

But as I have gone forward with my work, I've started to think more and more about the process of making it as the work – so my last exhibition included interviews with neighbours, family photos I found inside houses, my own research – this idea that it's not just about getting a photograph, it's about an experience: it's about the story of those neighbourhoods and those houses being represented too.



Installation view 'ISLAND' exhibition. FAC (Fremantle Arts Centre) 2017. Photograph © Ian Strange.

Art in the streets: Place, genre and encounter

**Alison Young,
University of Melbourne;
City, University of London**

This is a transcript of Professor Alison Young's keynote presentation at **Art on the Streets II: Art as Intervention**, at the ICA London, March 21 2018. In addition to original material, this talk draws on a number of her published works, including **Street Art World** (2016: London: Reaktion); **'On Walls in the Open City'** in Andrea Mubi Brighenti and Mattias Kärrholm (eds), **Urban Walls: Political and Cultural Meanings of Vertical Structures and Surfaces** (2019: London: Routledge), and **'Illicit Interventions in Public Nonspaces'** in Desmond Manderson (ed.) **Law and the Visual** (2018: Toronto: Toronto University Press). All photographs, unless otherwise stated, ©Alison Young.

Alison Young at AOTS II, ICA London (2018). Photograph © Le Grand Jeu, Paris



Alison Young is the Francine V. McNiff Professor of Criminology in the School of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Melbourne. Alison is the author of **Street Art World** (2016), **Street Art, Public City** (2014), **Street/Studio** (2010) (with Ghostpatrol, Miso and T. Smits), **Judging the Image** (2005) and **Imagining Crime** (1996), as well as numerous articles on the intersections of law, crime, and the image. She is the founder of the Urban Environments Research Network, an interdisciplinary group of academics, artists, activists and architects. She's also a Research Convenor within the Future Cities Cluster in the Melbourne Sustainable Societies Institute, and is a member of the Research Unit in Public Cultures, an interdisciplinary group of academics, artists, policymakers and urban designers interested in communicative cities, mobility, networked cultures, and public space. Alison is currently researching the relationships between art, culture, crime and urban atmospheres.

Alison Young: Now, in 2018, how do we think about art on the streets? How do we think about it going forward? Do we think about it in terms of its commodification, its exploitation, its relevance, its irrelevance, its adaptation, commercialisation, its politics – or some would say lack of politics – its charm, its shock value, its history? How can we keep all of those things in mind when we think about art on the streets?

If we pose further questions – what is a street, and what does it mean to talk about art in and on the streets – I think it's helpful to do so with reference to three different encounters.

First of all, an encounter with the street. I think of the street as a place, and also as a genre, and as a style or an aesthetic. In this section of the paper, I will be talking about images of multiple sites from many different cities. The second encounter is with the wall. The wall is the key surface that we think of when we encounter art on the streets, although it's not the only one. In this section I am thinking about the wall as a contested location or surface. I'm going to focus on two walls, which are located very close to each other in the neighbourhood that I live in. I've been documenting these walls over time, and I am trying to get a sense of how a wall might change and how our encounters with it might also change. The final section is an encounter with the void – by that I mean what it takes to produce a non-image. How an artist might actually make an image which rejects the idea of image. I'll be focusing on one city, and multiple sites within it.

Encounter 1: The Street

What makes an artwork part of the street?
What makes it a street artwork?

We have a stereotypical view of what a street might be. But, of course much art on the street is located on surfaces that don't really correspond to our idea of the street.

Here we see something that is high above a street in Tokyo (Figure 1, below). Is it still of the street? What makes it part of the street? Why is it not part of anywhere else? This is part of what I meant earlier when I referred to street as a genre, encompassing more than just the conventional built structure.



Figure 1. Neckface, Tokyo, 2017



Figure 2. Pure Evil, London coffee shop, 2015; Banksy works displayed in a gallery, 2014



Being of the street gives something a quality that we could call 'streetness'. Elements of streetness might include the location that we find something in – it might be an aesthetic or a style, or it might be the knowledge that we have about the identity of the artist, or the particular location as a popular site for work.

So, location does not necessarily have to mean the street, as in the outdoors – somewhere in a city or a town. If we think about Banksy canvases on display at a gallery or works by Pure Evil displayed on the walls of a London coffee shop (Figure 2) – their connection to the street is greatly reduced, compared with a Banksy on a wall in Williamsburg, or a Pure Evil tag on a wall in London.

The use of canvas or screen printing by the artist, and their display in a gallery or coffee shop, shouldn't disqualify them from the genre of street art. If we refuse them the status of street art, if we say they don't belong to the street, then we narrow our ideas about what street art might be. Then we prevent interrogation of the ways in which art institutions



Figure 3. Mural by Fintan McGee, additional works by Lush and unknown writers, Melbourne, 2016



Figure 5. Stickers, Tokyo, 2015

and businesses like coffee shops have monetised the idea of the street in street art. It's not that artworks stop being street art when they are moved into commercial spaces. But perhaps the issue might be that commerce and the street are not that separable, and the apparent immunity from commerce that we thought surrounded early works on the streets has perhaps been shown to be a bit of an illusion in the end.

A viewer might know that an artist or an artwork is of the street, because they know something about a particular spot or something about a particular artist. Some neighbourhoods become known for street art. Some artists become known for using particular spots. Or it may be that someone pays a walking tour company in order to teach them about street art.

There are ways in which the idea of art on the streets can be complicated. The certainties that we have around the genre of belonging to the street, that's one of the things that I'm interested in and I'd like to look at a few examples where the issue becomes more complicated.

Above we see a very large wall with a very large commissioned mural, by the artist Fintan McGee, in Melbourne. Next to it we can see part of an illicit non-commissioned artwork by the artist Lush, and over the

base of this, lots of tags and throw ups (Figure 3).

Do they all belong to the street? Are they all different versions of streetness? Are the illicit ones more street than the Fintan McGee mural? What's the relationship between illegality and our sense of art on the street?

In Figure 4 (below), we can see a series of words written by the artist Brad Downey in Berlin.

To some people this might look like nonsense, but if you know Brad Downey's work, then you would perceive this as part of a body of work in which the artist is interested in problematizing ways that we make meaning, problematizing ideas of tagging, problematizing ideas of the location that we make art in. But the spectator brings so much knowledge to both, that the idea that the artwork has any intrinsic essence to it is rendered quite problematic.

I'm a great fan of the sticker. And I think that the sticker is the most overlooked and ignored form of art on the street. Either as a singular item, or here, in Tokyo, where you get a kind of collage effect on the back of a street sign (Figure 5, above).

It is easy to overlook them in the street, it's easy not to theorise them. But I would want to argue that thinking

about the sticker can teach us things about other kinds of art in the street as well. In Figure 6, (overleaf) we can see an icon tag in Berlin, in a very inaccessible place.

It's not by any means in a street, or near a street, it's actually on a trainline – does it have streetness? Is it a street art work? For me, I would think yes, but it is possible to understand how city authorities for example can move to classify this as graffiti and not street art, and so on.

On the ground in Melbourne we can see a



Figure 4. Brad Downey, Berlin, 2010

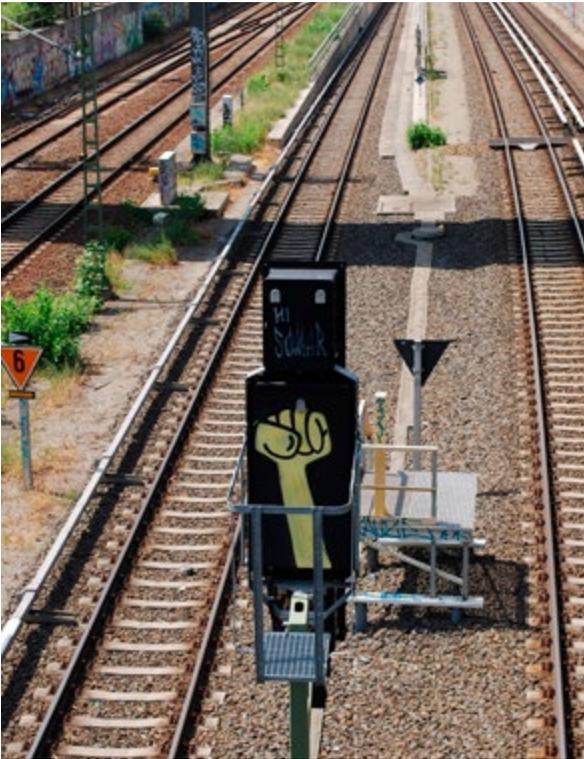


Figure 6. Tag, Berlin, 2010

Some people might think that it's ridiculous to talk about a little tag and a little bit of street infrastructure in the way that I just did. But I would strongly want to assert, why not? Why can't we think about this surface in the way that the artist thought about it – in positioning the letters, and sizing them and scaling them the way he did?

In Figure 8, we have a wall in Melbourne – more tags on it, on the right-hand panel, and lots of other examples of work along it.

This is a commissioned mural done with everyone's permission. The tags on the right pay tribute to graffiti writers in Melbourne over the decades. To me this is the least street connected work that I've shown. And I would argue that it's possible that you could say this is nothing to do with the street at all, even though it's on the street. I wonder whether we actually need new kinds of terminology – civic beautification, community murals, perhaps some new kind of a new cultural heritage if it becomes important to preserve and honour tags – which is a project I would support. Is this the right way to go about it? Is this a version of a new cultural heritage for a new art form? Is this how it should be done?

very small tag by Lister and some tags by other artists as well (Figure 7).

To me this is a highly interesting example of art on the street – literally on the street that you walk on. It's easy to walk over it and not notice it. I think Lister's text is perfectly positioned – the placement of the letters is really harmonious with the surface.



Figure 7. Tags by Lister and unknown writers, Melbourne, 2016

Encounter II: The Wall

Let's move to the second encounter. An encounter with two walls, two locations.

Each day when I walk between my home and my office I pass by this gallery. It's located on a street corner. These works are on paper, and have been pasted onto it (Figure 9).

And in Figure 10 (overleaf), you can see the other side of the gallery, two more works on paper pasted onto the side of the gallery and one piece that's been painted directly on it.

These refer to work that has been displayed in the gallery but also the central image refers to an icon of Australian art – Sydney Nolan's paintings of the Australian bushranger, Ned Kelly. These are hugely significant paintings within contemporary art. What's interesting to me is that the gallery is using the techniques of street artists in order to advertise fine art. It maintains the paste ups: when they get a little



Figure 8. Tags by Lister and unknown writers, Melbourne, 2016



Figure 9. Bridget McDonnell Gallery, Melbourne, 2016



Figure 10. Bridget McDonnell Gallery, Melbourne, 2016



Figure 12. 'Nost Kelly', Bridget McDonnell Gallery, Melbourne, 2016



Figure 11. Milk bar, Melbourne, 2016

weathered or tattered it takes them down and puts up new ones. And it touches up the Ned Kelly figure every so often. It's using the street in the way that a street artist would – it thinks about the positioning and so on – but it's very clearly referenced as fine art and not street art itself.

Around the corner from this building is another place I walk past each day (Figure 11). This is a vacant building, unoccupied – many years ago it was a milk bar, a small corner store – it's been unoccupied for many years. Artists have put up a great many things on it. Paste ups, tags, large graffiti pieces, political slogans, stickers. It's been an incredibly mobile surface, and I've been documenting it for about four or five years.

I'm interested in these walls because pasting paper and painting directly onto the walls are techniques used by both the gallery and by the artists who come past this site. Every so often the work gets buffed. You can see a range of different things that have been going on, on the wall.

The gallery wall gets tagged as well. All walls get tagged. But this gallery wall has been tagged because the artists and graffiti writers can identify very well that the gallery is using their techniques – it's pasting up on its own walls and it's painting directly on its own walls... and so they have come along to join in. Nost was a notorious graffiti writer in Melbourne who tagged very high up in places – every surface that he could over many years, and was in prison last year

for several months. So, the fact that he has written 'Nost Kelly' on the Ned Kelly figure is drawing a very interesting point of connection between the icon of fine art, the icon of Australian history – the outlaw – and the graffiti writer. In calling himself Nost Kelly he is reconfiguring himself in that vein (Figure 12).

So, here's what happens when the work gets tagged. The gallery comes out and cleans them up. When the milk bar gets tagged, it also gets buffed. It's buffed in a really lazy, very typical way – it's not a complete paintover, it's an obliteration of what was there. And the buff results in responses from artists, so once a buff is added, it gets repainted by artists, and it gets buffed again, and then more tags get added.

And then one day, in the middle of all this swirl of imagery a small sign appeared (Figure 13).

You can see it here on the central wall. A little blue sign. And it became of interest to me because it's also placed there illicitly. It was advertising the sponsorship



Figure 13. Sign, milk bar wall, Melbourne, 2017

of a school fair by an estate agent. This is common in Melbourne. Estate agents donate their signs, they make a sign for the school fair which can be put up in various places around the city... you are supposed to get permission to do it, but with a derelict milk bar, there was no one to get permission from. So, it says the name of the estate agent, says that it's a primary school fete. It states the date of the event. The date of the event is long in the past, but this sign stayed on the wall for months, untouched. The buff, when it was carried out, took place around it. There was no attempt to remove it. Something about it had an air of authority. It's as though the council cleaning crew when they came to paint over it, they would say, "Hmm, this sign has a right to be here", yet there was no actual utility to the sign anymore. But something in the authority of the idea of sponsorship, of the estate agent, the school, gave it a right to be there that the other illicit works did not have.

In Figure 14, you can see a post-buffed Ned Kelly on the outside of the gallery.

The lettering is still faintly visible underneath it but it's been painted over by the gallery. The painted outlaw figure of Ned Kelly has more authority to be there than the additions of graffiti writers.

So, I was monitoring these mobile walls, these changing sites, and finding it very interesting that the estate agent sign stayed. It stayed tenaciously to the wall for 18 months. Until last week, when it was gone.

Paint had replaced whatever vaguely eroded paint was underneath it, a fresh rectangle of paint sat there, and artists were now adding work around it. I've been monitoring this for about 5 years – and I'm continuing to do so – watch this space and see what happens.

Encounter III: The Void

The third encounter is with the void. Here I want to ask – is it possible to imagine a non-image? What happens when illicit images are created in a very particular part of public space? In what is called, by some theorists, a non-space. My interest is in the public transport stop. The areas on and in which we stand when we are waiting for a train, or a tram, or a bus. These might take the form of station platforms, specially built areas, or it might be a smaller slice of space, that's been set aside on a pavement, or a demarcated area in a roadway. It's for passengers to wait for trains buses trams and so on. These are excellent examples of what has been called a non-space. Non-spaces lack functions other than suspension and transition. Individuals move through these spaces only in order

to get out of them. They are travelling from one place to another, and it takes them through the non-place. They've got no desire to spend time within it – these non-places exist just as territory to be crossed, and when they are not crossing through it, they are held in suspension, they are waiting until they are able to cross through them, or exit from them. Public transport stops are non-spaces. The stop exists to enable passengers just to gather in one place until they can board the train, on their route.

The work of Art in Ad Places, Brandalism, Public Ad Campaign, Vermibus, Jordan Seiler, and many others, has become familiar to us in recent years. What they do is often called subvertising. Within the community of subvertisers, working in non-spaces and public transport sites, the Melbourne-based activities of Kyle Magee are distinctive in several ways. He's evolved a means of altering the advertisements located within these panels which doesn't rely on having a key or any other means of accessing the advert that's located within, and which doesn't aim for speed of subvertising or for the avoidance of arrest. So, in Melbourne, Magee has engaged in a series of interventions that cover adverts.

His actions take place in a kind of struggle over the image. A struggle that involves his rejection of what he says is corporate capitalist advertising, and what he wants is a total worldwide ban on corporate capitalist for profit advertising in public media and public space. He began his actions against advertising in 2005, and he started

Figure 14. Detail, Ned Kelly on wall, BridgetMcDonnell Gallery, Melbourne, 2016



painting over billboards. After some months, he was arrested, and when he resumed his activities, he maintained the strategy of painting ads but he shifted the location – from full scale billboards to painting over smaller adverts at tram shelters. He reasoned that if he was painting a smaller amount of surface then the damage that could be claimed to be caused by him would be less, therefore the punishment should be less. If you are charged with criminal damage, it's usually expressed as a financial sum of damage that you've caused – if painting a billboard leads to a charge of causing £20K worth of damage, he thought a tram shelter would occasion lower sentences.

So, he painted over panels for a lengthy period, but then he switched his mode of intervention again and he decided he would paste paper over the adverts to cover them, again in the belief that this might occasion less 'damage' and lead to lesser charges.

Pasting paper didn't solve the problem of being charged, he has faced many sets of charges arising from papering over tram stops and he has served several prison sentences now. He has had so many

Figure 15. Tram shelter outside County Court, Melbourne.
Photograph © Kyle Magee



convictions that now whenever he is arrested, he goes to prison. One of his favoured spots is at the street intersection where the County Court, Magistrates' Court and the Supreme Court are located – he doesn't seek to avoid arrest, and he believes that choosing a site that is next to the courts saves time for everyone.

Figure 15 is an example of a work that's been painted. You can see that when he was doing this he formed a very neat rectangle where everything that was underneath was obliterated. Once he changed tactic and started papering, then, as I said the idea wasn't to create another image – but he simply adds the paper until he is satisfied that the advert is obscured. It doesn't have to be even, it doesn't have to be a total covering, it simply satisfied his sense that the ad is obscured.

This is one of the main train stations in Melbourne – he chooses very public spaces, he chooses very busy times of the day, he chooses heavily surveilled places. He puts his name and website and mobile phone number on the paper to make it easier for the police to come and to arrest him. When passers-by speak to him, he says he they are welcome to call the police if they wish (Figure 16).

So, what is going on? Magee is not trying to create an alternative image. He is not trying to design something that is an aesthetically pleasing alternative to the advert. He's not writing culture jamming slogans, he is not removing the advert and replacing it with an artwork. The purpose of what he is doing is simply to draw attention to the fact that they cover an ad. So, what he is doing is creating a negation, he is creating a nothing, so the spectator does not even have to generate any kind of accurate interpretation of what he is doing – vandalism, damage, culture jamming, subvertising, and so on – instead, the spectator just encounters the result as something that has changed the space and the flow of people in the space, and that demands engagement in the interpretation. So, before any particular emotional or intellectual response

is generated, the image seeks the spectator's engagement as a nothing, as an interruption, or a disruption. So, any meaning in what they see can only be generated through an active engagement or encounter – with the brushstrokes, or with these haphazardly placed sheets of paper. I am interested in these as a non-image, or an image that seeks to be a non-image, an image that prefers a void – its brushstrokes or its pieces of paper represent the idea of a void, and do so in preference to an image in the form of an advertisement (Figure 17).

When I've been thinking about Magee's non-images, I think that this might help us work out what is the art that we see in the streets so often today. I'm not looking for a commissioned wall of tribute tags, or for a preserved wall with a Banksy piece on it, I'm not looking for an encounter with a famous artist who has dropped into town and put up a mural with the consent of the community – I'm interested in an encounter with all of the disruptive possibilities that the street can offer. I am interested in what we mean by a wall, what kinds of things seem to fall short of being an image, because that should make us question our definitions of what an image is. It's in these non-images by Kyle Magee, the switching swirl of images over time on the milk bar wall, in the tags on the gallery's posters, in the words that Brad Downey has written on the overpass, on the stickers on the backs of street signs, and Lister's little tag on the ground. It's in these images that I want to argue that we can find art as an interruption, as an intervention, and art that is of, on and in the streets.

Figure 16. Southern Cross train station, Melbourne.
Photograph © Kyle Magee



Figure 17. Tram shelter, Melbourne.
Photograph © Kyle Magee



Sticking it to the Man: The visual activism of Dr. D

Adrian Burnham
Flyingleaps
London

This essay is based on Adrian Burnham's recent talks on The Visual Activism of Dr. D at Nuart Plus, Aberdeen, and Art on the Streets II: Art as Intervention, London. All photographs, unless otherwise stated, ©Adrian Burnham.

Adrian Burnham has a long held empirical interest in both the variety and efficacy of interventions on urban space and a particular fascination with paper-based art and visual activism. His career spans both a mundane engagement with the metropolis – as a commercial flyposter in the 1980s and 90s – to more academic study of the city and the social production of space at Goldsmiths University. After 10 years leading courses and lecturing on art and design at Hackney Community College, in June 2016 he founded and continues to curate www.flyingleaps.co.uk: a street display and online platform for socio-politically engaged artists. He regularly writes about and gives talks on art and urban culture.



Adrian Burnham at Nuart Plus Aberdeen 2018.
Photograph © Susan Hansen

Subvertising, ad-busting, culture jamming, billboard détournements... Call it what you will, hijacking or doctoring corporate advertising and/or co-opting official signage in the urban environment continues to be a favoured tactic of socio-politically motivated artists and visual activists. While it's debatable whether flyposted oppositional art or visual activism has any direct effect in bringing about sociopolitical change, what it can do at its best is feed into the public's disposition. Through strong imagery, cogent or quizzical text, humour, relatively speedy production and distribution, via its capacity to occupy anomalous spaces in the urban environment. and through an imaginative, enacted engagement with matters of concern, it can generate social media interest and help inform, even propel, opinion.

For Art on the Streets II at the ICA, London and Nuart Plus Aberdeen (2018) I talked about various aspects of flyposted street interventions by focussing on works by Dr. D. a visual activist from London, England, whose efforts 'doctoring' everything from big brand billboards to political posters have earned him a degree of recognition that spans the urban interventionist spectrum. The more militant, anti-capitalist wing admires Dr D's fearless excoriation of right wing public figures and his decades' long persistence. While the more popular street art audience, casual urban spotters, delight in his pared down wit and audacity.

I kicked off my survey of Dr D's work with a seemingly forthright piece of his that had stencilled in emphatic, crudely kerned, white capital lettering the phrase 'We have a dream and you're not in it!' (Figure 1).

That's put passersby firmly in their alienated place then. But there's more. In the photograph I showed it seems at first – still-fresh wet glue stain framing the work – an arbitrary one-liner. A withering remark randomly slapped on half a sheet of ply leaning against

a roadside barrier. I thought just to have succeeded in intervening in this corporately saturated, civically micro-managed space is something of a coup as to seeding alternative voices in the midst of, and at the same time commenting on, consumer culture.

Then in the background you catch the name of the shop the poster is pasted in front of: *Mirage* electronic cigarettes. Now, 'We have a dream...' isn't just a general general jibe in an amorphous urban context. Its placement uses a feature of its immediate surroundings to open up, to expand its pertinence. Who's the 'We' referring to? Is Dr. D casting the whole urban spectacle as ephemeral or unreal as a mirage? Something we shouldn't trust?

And reading the work is further layered when we notice 'We have a dream...' is printed on a vivid, deep pink flock wall paper. A material so associated with the interiors of old pubs, Indian restaurants, great aunt's parlours, etc., that it positively reeks of snug, la-di-da indoorsness. Only now it's outdoors. So we have not only a text that is disaffecting, a location that offers dialogical opportunities, but also a sense of displacement embodied in the materials used to make it.

The relation between Dr D's work and its particular placement is on occasion more obviously pointed. He was also in the Granite City with Nuart but while I shuffled bits of paper, Dr. D got to work round the town and surrounds of Aberdeen. The city was once infamous for having more 'No Ball Games' signs up than anywhere else in the UK. It's also a near neighbour to Trump's golf links. Dr. D affixed to road signage directing traffic to the abominably coiffed POTUS's pitch n putt, a sign work that read, *No Bald Games* (Figure 2). Right under the noses of Trump employees it probably didn't last long, but to a degree the act of putting it up at all, committing principled civil disobedience, is very much a part of Dr. D's practice.



Figure 1. We Have A Dream... Hand stencil on flock wallpaper, London 2014.



Figure 2. No Bald Games. Faux street signage, Balmedie, Aberdeenshire, Scotland 2018.

Similarly apposite in terms of placement, but hopefully much longer lasting, were two adjacent 10ft high hoardings at Nuart Aberdeen. Though the erection of the works was sanctioned this time, installed as they were directly above the entrance and exit barriers to a shopping complex, the giant iteration of 'We have a dream...' proved a sharper, more direct barb at retail therapy and its pretensions to be a coping mechanism. The adjacent work was an image of a monumental Coca Cola can that on closer inspection was actually labelled Cocaine with bold black text underneath that read, *Buy the world a God*. It was sited both on, and directly opposite, the first floor windows of church owned property. Whoops.

Over a period spanning almost 20 years, Dr. D's output has taken numerous forms, some of which I'll elaborate on, but first a whistle-stop tour of a few of his favoured subjects: (i) His *HMP London* (and elsewhere) series of posters in various formats critiques surveillance culture (Figure 3).

(ii) Rupert Murdoch's face with the words *What A Jeremy Hunt* 'stickered' over his mouth is one amongst many Dr. D works that challenge abuses of power. (iii) A billboard détournement portraying David Cameron – Conservative Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 2010 to 2016 – as a 'Pirate of the Coalition' takes aim at one of the buccaneers of Tory policy being geared towards austerity: incompetent, short-sighted and self-serving governance is a subject Dr. D returns to time and time again (Figure 4).

There's a sense that paste-ups and other DIY interventions are media open to 'anybody'. And if this isn't altogether true there is at least an argument that flyposting can access spaces usually dominated by the corporate clients of outdoor advertising companies like J.C. Decaux, Primesight and Clear Channel.



Figure 3. HMP London 6. Sheet ad intervention, London 2014.



Figure 4. Pirates of the Coalition. 96 Sheet billboard détournement, London 2010.

Another recurring feature of Dr. D's practice are his various interventions that represent and enact participation – works that in quite practical terms invite/promote involvement and public dialogue. These can take the form of ludicrously direct, spontaneous ad takeovers. For example, removing existing panel ads on London Underground trains, turning them over and using that blank canvas to make a work before reinserting it back into its original frame. Dr. D's *Flip the Script* takes this approach (Figure 5). A ballpoint pen simply Blu-Tacked to the work, the cheeky 'woz-ere' type comment: *Look Mum NO Ads* and another scribbled reassurance confirming that *mistakes are welcome*. This, again, is deceptively simple. As well as the literal invitation for alternative voices to contribute to, and contradict the corporate wraparound, its ad hoc form both mocks and interrupts the often too slick surfaces of our urban environment.

In the same vein, but a more sophisticated takeover – involving a selection of marker pens in a tin – sees Dr. D replacing large six sheet bus stop ads with his ambiguous *Who Asked You?* intervention. It's double-edged because the phrase first reads as a combative put down, a rebuke that's usually intended to shut someone up. At the same time, it emerges as a reminder that the public are invariably not asked for their opinions on subjects that affect their lives.

While I'm principally concerned here with Dr. D's paper-based works on all sorts of spaces, his practice is much broader and includes organizing events, 3D interventions in the streets, and taking over incongruous venues – his 2009 *Brainwash* installation in a Bethnal Green launderette being a good example. There have also been floating protests on canals: waterborne support for the NHS, anti-privatisation of



Figure 5. Flip the Script. Underground ad intervention, London 2012.

public services, etc. And while the issues raised might be seen as standard and shared by many a left-leaning communitarian conscience it is Dr. D's methods, as much as the messages, that mark him out as more effective in terms of prominence and provocation. In *Extrastatecraft* (2014) Keller Easterling's concern was to unearth and explore ways that publics might better understand and counter the power of global infrastructure. Her proposed use of 'less heroic' techniques in support of radical reform proffer a range of tactics that accord with Dr. D.'s thinking and practice:

Techniques that are less heroic, less automatically oppositional, more effective, and sneakier – techniques like gossip, rumor, gift-giving, compliance, mimicry, comedy, remote control, meaninglessness, misdirection, distraction, hacking, or entrepreneurialism (Easterling, 2014: .213).

Transgressing boundaries can reveal hidden rules. One could cite the precedents of the carnivalesque 'telling truth to power', vaudevillian comedy, Dada gestures in art, but all of these, in a "it's only a bunch of pucks/entertainers /artists" sense, operated in 'sanctioned' arenas. Dr. D's contributions to the urban environment are rarely sanctioned and it's this that contributes significantly to their traction and incisiveness (Figure 6).

Working on the fly and often employing low-tech media affords opportunities to react to events quickly. Shortly after Charles Saatchi was photographed violently squeezing his then wife Nigella Lawson's throat, Dr. D's large paste-up of Saatchi's face with the words 'Charlie screws you up' appeared on a London street (Figure 7). Saatchi is an ex advertising baron and notoriously bullish art collector whose 1992 Young British Artists show spawned a movement – the YBAs – which included now famous artists such as Tracey Emin, Damien Hirst and Sara Lucas. Lawson is a



Figure 6. G.C.H.Q. Always Listening... Poster, stencil on brown paper, London 2013.

journalist and one of the world's most recognisable TV chefs.

The 'Charlie screws you up' work is a prime example of DIY interventions on the urban environment affording an effective platform for disapproval. Often a starting point for Dr. D's interventions is to ask the very straightforward question "What's the problem?" The problem addressed in the work featuring Saatchi was an occasion of domestic violence in a public place: a bully abusing their power. Saatchi and Lawson were divorced shortly afterwards.

Piggybacking recognizable 'brands' is another key characteristic of Dr. D's practice. Producing variations

of the classic *Evening Standard* newspaper poster has been a favoured tactic for Dr. D. The artists Gilbert & George – who in a 2012 newspaper interview referred to Boris Johnson as "a wonderful modern person" – have also used *Evening Standard* posters in their work.

One significant difference between what the famous artist duo get up to and Dr. D's approach is that while Gilbert & George extract 'realism' from the street



Figure 7. Charlie Screws You Up. Large paste-up, London 2013. Photograph © Paolo Redwings.

and elevate it into a high art, elitist commodity, Dr. D reproduces this form, associated with knee-jerk shock or tacky, titillating banalities and employs it to address pressing social and political concerns albeit with his trademark mordant, somewhat surreal, wit.

Dr. D's *Evening Standard* poster work that reads 'Jeremy Corbyn Ate My Hamster' makes reference to the veteran Labour leftwinger whose election in 2015 to become Leader of the Official Opposition was one of the biggest upsets in British political history (Figure 8). It also invokes an apparently trivial tabloid headline about a comedian 'Freddie Starr Ate My Hamster' from 1986, and succinctly demonstrates how mainstream media frame and demonise political developments and individuals who challenge the interests of rich and powerful establishment figures. When you learn it was the notorious publicist Max Clifford who encouraged *The Sun* newspaper to run the original Freddie Starr story even though he knew it wasn't true, the Dr. D work becomes a critique of underhand, profit driven media misinformation and the cynical manipulation of publics.

Another intervention that on the face of it seems crudely didactic, but rewards further consideration, is Dr. D's two billboards, one above the other, that read *The Sterile State of Hackney and East End Bloc* (Figure 9). Though 'unpolished' in some respects: limited palette, simple design and stencil-type rendering, this is far from a tag-and-run operation.

The Sterile State of Hackney and East End Bloc works appeared throughout said borough and more generally around East London. You might think the Marxist-Leninist red star and sparse block-capital lettering, the scale and God-like vantage point – certainly of higher billboards – all indicate a somewhat dictatorial

Figure 9. The Sterile State of Hackney and East End Bloc. Double 48 Sheet billboard poster intervention, London 2008.



declaration. Pasted up, however, during the death throes of New Labour, one can read the appearance of the red star motif as a cheeky dig at Blair and co.'s neoliberal dilution of core socialist values.

Choosing to 'stamp' the city with enigmatic 'appeals to question' rather than – what they may first appear as – dictatorial sloganeering suggests an instinctive knowledge of the 'slipperiness' of texts on Dr. D's part. The viewer is not quite told what to think but pointedly invited to wonder what the 'Sterile State' is referring to. Is it the then notoriously incompetent management of funds, schools and services by Hackney Borough Council? And what does 'Bloc' mean? That venal scramble by an 'alliance' of East London boroughs to carve up and scoff from the pre-2012 Olympic trough?

These stark messages were seeking to unsettle, affect and contribute to tweaking the disposition of publics. Some passersby might dismiss the works as a red star diatribe, but then be confused because New Labour were supposed to have ousted the loony left years beforehand. Others, a good proportion of whom were fiercely suspicious of the whole Olympic smoke and mirrors 'regeneration' project, might read the work as a

resurgence of a popular socialist conscience (perhaps presciently as it happens).

So, billboards; collages; interventions on public transport that mimic the look of official signage; faux street signage; large paste-ups and more discreet scale posters that target governmental and corporate malfeasance such as Dr. D's *GCHQ Always Listening to our Customers* and *Primate Change Now. Carbon Addiction is Killing us* works; oversized and witty, mock Community Chest and Chance



Figure 8. Jeremy Corbyn Ate My Hamster. Mock Evening Standard poster, London 2016.

cards left in the streets that draw comparison between what real life developers, planners, investors are 'playing at' and Monopoly, the board game that came to epitomize rampant acquisition and speculation (and usually cheating) even if its politically left leaning, anti-landlord origins sought to do quite the opposite. And that's, as I've said, without even taking into account Dr. D's numerous 3D interventions, his supplying of protest placards and generously assisting other visual activists to site their work innovatively in city streets. As Brighenti (2007: 333) has argued:

In the absence of dissonant messages, representations tend to settle down and stabilize themselves. That is why the issue of access to the places of visibility is a central political question. To access these places is the precondition for having a voice in the production of representations. More precisely, it is not simply 'access' that matters, but rather the styles and modes of access (Brighenti, 2007: 333).

It should be clear by now that Dr. D's ongoing body of work operates on many levels. There's righteous but often subtle indignation, wit and thoughtful provocation. And throughout, a dedication and persistence across so many styles and modes of urban intervention. The range of work and constant invention as to places of visibility stirs up and disrupts the tendency of dominant socio-political narratives to prevail unchallenged.

Before signing off with a change of tack I want to point out one further element to Dr. D's practice. Many recognise the graphic invention and wit as well as his canny, pointed positioning of works. A feature that is less often remarked upon is the emotional charge his work can carry. I'm thinking of the giant 'ransom note' style interventions on billboards left blank by the outdoor advertising companies (Figure 10 and Figure 11).

Like much of Dr. D's output, these gigantic epigrammatic works are an act of gifting that 'brightens' people's day. 'Gifts' that are often remarked on and circulated via social media. They are archetypes of roadside distraction. But while these billboards could be said to be one-liner 'shout outs' at passersby, multiple connotations soon emerge.

With irregular letters culled from newspapers, the stencilled ransom note style works are at once comical – on account of their blatancy and scale, ransom notes are usually intimate or at least secretive communications – but there is also a melancholic desperation. It is not established whom exactly is *Left sucking the mop again* so perhaps this refers to a general malaise. Dr. D's *Wait here for further instructions* billboard intervention seems similarly abject. Seeing this in the teeming environment, that 'thick' urban space as sociologists sometimes refer to it (Read, 2001), one mentally plays out the required act but soon enough it dawns on the viewer that even in

Figure 10. Left Sucking the Mop Again. 48 Sheet stencil intervention, London 2009.



Figure 11. Wait Here For Further Instructions. 48 Sheet stencil intervention, London 2009.



Figure 12. I Remember the Future. Poster work, various formats, London and Oslo 2018.



the busiest of urban hubs, if we did as the billboard suggests, the likelihood of 'rescue' or that an offer of purposeful life chances might occur while you wait there is, well, zero.

A more recent 2018 work showing a yellow floppy disc on a grubby, grey-violet background with the phrase beneath

in 'glittery' silver type, *I remember the future*, is also emotionally charged (Figure 12, above). While the ransom note billboards suggest existential angst, *I remember...* challenges the positive trajectory of humankind whereby things can only get better. This is clearly not the case here in the UK and around the world. It's perhaps not surprising that certain of Dr. D's works seem riven with estrangement, disappointment and a palpable, gut-wrenching dolour.

To conclude, almost every example of Dr. D's work referred to here so far presents as the sort of stuff many people could at least imagine themselves doing. There's rarely any technical wizardry, but I'm going to wind up with a further strain of his visual activism that first requires a bit of context. In recent years, we've seen a significant shift by, in the US, Jordan

Seiler's PublicAdCampaign, and Art in Ad Places who have been hijacking NY phone kiosk ad spaces and installing artwork. The work of Special Patrol Group, smart and radical publications by Dog Section Press here in the UK and globally Brandalism has, of course, coordinated some brilliant interventions. Recently legallyblack and the advocacyacademy had some incisive work installed in Brixton regarding the visibility of the BAME community in film. The shift to more militant, progressive and/or anti-consumerist interventions on commercial advertising space usually monopolised by corporate entities is flourishing.

What particularly interests me in this regard with Dr. D's work is when his interventions mimic the visual language of adverts or, in the case of his *Curfew* posters, municipal signage (Figure 13). There's still wit – this work plays on the 'Congestion Charge' in London – but as these works wear the 'livery' of officialdom they pass under the radar, rather than sticking out like a sore thumb, and to even read them as oppositional can take a second or third glance.

The spectacle, populist media, policing and right leaning policy all cohere to manage a supposed 'democratic' society in its own image. With *Curfew*, the 'content' and surreptitious physical form of the work reiterates the passers-by's lack of access and agency. Mimicry of the visual languages of authority and its revelation to be false, mocking and/or questionable interrupts prevailing messages of social control. They prompt both mirth and an uneasy feeling that we're constantly being micro-managed. And the fact that publics are first induced to ignore or rather not see such works (who reads a notice we think we've already seen a thousand times?) makes the eventual realization that they do not belong all the more subversive.

It is the way such interventions query our constant subjection to behavioural and other boundaries that constitutes their valuable work of dissent. Long before Owen Jones sought to expose the consequences of our 'Because I'm Worth It Culture' and how 'an ever more unequal distribution of wealth leaves those in power with the feeling that they have every right to ever greater slices of it.' Dr. D had 're-presented' the L'Oreal advert as *N'Oreal* (Figure 14).

Hair from India. Voice via auto tune. Publicity by Satan. A key feature of this vein of work is how Dr. D is apparently seeking to be more thoroughly 'woven into' the urban fabric rather than stamped on to its surface. Also, with *N'Oreal*, in part the point is that we absorb the image, and take it for granted, pretty much as we would any 'pleasing' example of the advertisers' seductive (normative) handiwork. Clocking visual activism in official ad sites can lend them a sort of delayed impetus that contributes to their effect. These works remind us that our lives are continually filtered, mediated, trammled: be that by personal earphones, screens, 'happy' pills, endless exhortations to consume and, at the same time, to do as we are told. All this becomes who we are: a society driven more and more by the prerogatives of the market economy.

The urban spectacle would have us believe that its overriding character is, yes aspirational, but emphatically neutral and apolitical: that generally we're going to be just fine if we carry on pretty much as we are. Dr. D's pithy interventions, highlighting so many germane issues and employing such a wide variety of modes of address, repeatedly suggest otherwise (Figure 15).

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Sticking it to the man

Figure 13. Curfew. 6 Sheet ad intervention, London 2016.



Figure 14. N'Oreal. 6 Sheet bus stop ad intervention, London 2011.



Figure 15. N'Oreal. 6 Sheet bus stop ad intervention, London 2011.



Turning the white cube inside out

Pietro Rivasi and Andrea Baldini discuss their provocative new book UN(AUTHORIZED)//COMMISSIONED

Pietro Rivasi started painting graffiti in the mid 90s. He graduated in pharmaceutical biotechnology, and in 2002 started organizing graffiti and street art related events (Icône, Quadricromie) and collaborating with some of the most influential magazines in the field (Garage Magazine, Graff Zoo). From 2005, he co-curated public architecture and art library “Luigi Poletti’s” collections of urban arts books; and from 2009 he started regular curatorial activity (Spazio Avia Pervia, D406) mostly with artists coming from a “urban” background and organized talks and conferences. In 2015, he participated as a curator in the exhibition, “The bridges of graffiti”, an event coordinated in parallel with the 56th Venice Biennale. In 2016, Rivasi curated “1984. Evoluzione e rigenerazione del writing” at Galleria Civica di Modena. In 2018 he started a new collaboration with Whole Train Press and Vicolo Folletto Art Factories, a contemporary art gallery based in Reggio Emilia. He lives and works in Modena Italy.

Andrea Baldini is Associate Professor of Art Theory and Aesthetics at the School of Arts of Nanjing University, China. His research focuses on theoretical issues emerging from street art’s institutionalization, with particular reference to this urban practice’s relationship with the law and the museum. His monograph “I Fought the Law and the Law Swanned: Street Art and the Law” is forthcoming for Brill Research Perspectives in Art and Law (Brill, 2018). An essay exploring the ethical dimension of an extension of copyright and moral rights to street art will appear in Enrico Bonadio (ed.), *Copyright in Street Art and Graffiti: A Country-by-Country Legal Analysis* (CUP, 2019). Baldini’s curatorial work focuses on issues emerging in cross-cultural contexts of artistic and aesthetic appreciation. In 2019, his exhibition *Images and Words*, on the relationship between graffiti and Chinese calligraphy and landscape painting, is scheduled to appear in museums across China.

UN(AUTHORIZED)//COMMISSIONED is a companion to the exhibition, “1984: Evoluzione e rigenerazione del writing” at Palazzina dei Giardini, Galleria Civica di Modena.

Pietro, your curatorial practice diverges from standard curatorial practice, in that it seems very much ground up, rather than top-down. You pair getting up with photography as a means to translate the values of the scene to the art world.

Pietro Rivasi: I am not a professional curator. I never studied art. I just started painting graffiti in the 90s, and then I started organising the first festivals here in Italy, mixing up graffiti with some stuff that we have come to call street art. The first festival we organised was in 2002, and we also curated small indoor shows with the same artists. From the beginning, the most important point for selecting artists to take part was to be up, and to be respected by the scene.

When I grew older I started to look more to other galleries who were starting to show street art. Something I never really understood was why they were showing people who never got up in the street. And when a lot of very good illustrators started to paint murals and sell canvases as if they were street artists, I was like, "hey this doesn't reference anything within the real graffiti and street art world." When I do shows, I try and point out that if you want to represent the street culture, then you must be respected within that culture, and if you are not, if you don't have this background, you should stick to some other field.

For me graffiti is definitely an artform. The strength of graffiti as a communication system comes from it being in the street. That's why it got attention in the 70s. It was strong because it was on the trains. If kids were just writing on paper, at home, nobody would have noticed them. So, the strong part was the work being in the street, and being political – really radical – against public and private property. But when graffiti writers started to do shows, they started to do shows with canvases. And all the other aspects of their work got lost.

My way to try to reconnect these various aspects was to curate shows using photographs of illegally painted pieces – and to try to get gallery visitors to think: "Why should I consider a piece painted without permission in the street as vandalism, but if I see the same picture in the museum, why should I consider it as an artwork?" – "Because there is a curator who tells me, this is art?" And that's why, in 1984, we included artists who were painting stuff illegally in the streets, in the same city, at the same time. We had the photographs of their work inside the gallery and the actual pieces still up in the



streets, so people could, in theory, see the piece inside the gallery and outside in the street.

So, 1984 blurred the boundaries between the inside and the outside of the museum?

The starting point for me was that we have graffiti writers and street artists that want to reach a different audience. And some of them are really good at stuff that really works well in the street, but they are not as good at doing canvases. If we have writers and street artists that want to go into galleries, is there a way to have their work exposed so that they feel that it has not been completely decontextualized in order to sell something? Can we do it in a way that is more like the original practice?

If they want to enter the galleries, in my view, we must find some other solution. And the solution we present in this book is the most respectful of the original practice as possible. If you use the documentation of the practice as the artwork – a photograph, or a video, or a sketch – you are doing something that performance artists and land artists used to do in the 1970s, so it's really nothing new. It's something that the artworld has already accepted and exploited. So why can't we do the same for urban art? That also gives the artist the possibility to continue painting in the streets, and at the same time to get some money and recognition for their art staying in the streets – as an alternative to studio-based practice.

How did the museum react to the inclusion of illegal works in the show?

The museum really didn't know in advance exactly what the show would feature, but they reacted really well to the final result. Of course, I submitted a proposal for the whole show, some months before, so they knew I wanted to work on the concept of vandalism as art. So, they were aware of the focus of the show, and actually they understood that the most controversial part was probably the most interesting.

In your book, you talk about the museum acquiring a work painted without permission WITHOUT seeking to remove it from its original location in the streets. To your knowledge, is this the first time this has occurred?

This acquisition came about because the museum recognised that this was actually the most interesting part of the work. If it was a street-based work by Banksy or BLU they would probably have protected it without asking anything, but the controversy comes about because the artist who painted this was really not that famous – within the art world at least. That was the most controversial part – to have a public institution recognise vandalism as art without economic values telling them that they should recognise it.

I discussed this with Robert Kaltenhäuser and also the curator-artist Jens Besser – both were involved in the development of the ideas behind this acquisition. We think that this is the first example of this kind. The idea behind the museum's acquisition was to leave the work in the street to fade away – and whatever happens to the work happens. The idea is that the institution recognises it, and acquires the photographs of the piece. So, when the piece disappears, the institution still has the photographs, and the photographs will then be the artwork. It's the only thing that testifies that the artwork ever existed.

In terms of the illegal work itself, is there anything in situ that marks it as having been acquired by the museum?

We designed a plate and we dealt with the city's cultural authorities and officials. We wanted to put the plate in the street, to signal to the people that this is a real artwork that the institution acquired, but we are in Italy, and there are plenty of bureaucrats in the city council. We are still waiting for definitive permission.

Maybe once the work has gone, you'll get the plate?

That would not be a problem – it would work, even like this! The plate comes with a QR code, so you can take a picture and see the painting even if it has disappeared.

In the museum, where the photograph was displayed, was there a map of the work and its location, so people could go and find it?

No, but the title of the artwork was the name of the building – and everyone in the city knows this building, so there was no map. We also did some guided tours as part of the show.

Andrea, let's talk about your section of the book. Can we talk some more about what the "appreciative practice" in graffiti involves?

Andrea Baldini: I borrowed the concept of

appreciative practice from the work of Dom Lopes, who is also a philosopher of art. The concept comes from his work on the definition of art. The idea is that we don't need to seek a general definition of art, but we can define locally, different forms of art, or forms of expression, as appreciative practices. We can understand the practice by which you appreciate a set of objects by relating those objects to other elements of the practice – or to other objects that are similar. Objects can be the focus of different appreciative practices, which might share some borders. When you look at objects of design, you can look at an object of design and appreciate it as, for instance a coffee machine, or as an example of design. These might involve slightly different appreciative practices, because they put emphasis on different features. So, when you relate it to graffiti, then what happens is that you appreciate graffiti by looking at other examples of graffiti.

You argue that, "the core of the appreciative practice in graffiti relies on engaging with reproductions rather with originals; and that (ii) reproductions do not lack any of the salient properties that are relevant to the appreciation of graffiti."

In general, there are two sources for this claim. One is based on discussion and the second on observation. This claim comes primarily from my observations on the life of graffiti writers, when I was hanging out with some writers in L'Aquila in Italy. It was their reunion after 10 years. They were preparing an historic show where they were going to put together all their pictures from 10-15 years of writing.

I remember them showing each other their photographs, and I remember this sense of community, this sense of enjoyment – I hadn't experienced this before. It felt like something very authentic to their practice, and something very true to what they produced, because of course most of them hadn't seen all of the pieces the others had done. And this reminds me of FRA 32's reaction to 1984. When I talked to FRA 32 about the exhibition, he was very sceptical about the project, but after he had seen the installation of photographs dedicated to his work, his comment was that "it felt so authentic."

So, it's not even just the sharing of photos online or on Instagram today – it's something that has a long trajectory within graffiti, and it seems to me to be the natural way in which writers experience graffiti – not all of the time – but a bulk of this experience is through photographs, or so called reproductions, rather than through the originals.

That's definitely part of that subcultural practice. Were blackbooks something you considered – you know, writers' documentation of planned works, or works in process?

Pietro Rivasi: Actually, we named our installation of

more than 1000 pictures: *Blackbook*. The idea was to transform the concept of the blackbook into an art installation for the white cube. In the show we had three different installations, that were each named after something specific to graffiti culture: *Blackbook*, *The Buff* and *The Writers' Bench*. *Blackbook* was this huge photo installation that was meant for the people to enter and feel the foolishness of the writer who goes out every day to paint their name without giving a fuck about the consequences.

The idea was to be overwhelmed by the ego and the recklessness of being a graffiti writer. For *The Buff*, we used video screens. The video was of a guy buffing the same piece, over and over and over again – to give the spectator the impression that the act of destroying art always involves the same gesture, always the same result. For the *Writers' Bench*, we had a slide show, that was on constantly over the lifespan of the show. Every picture was a panel painted during the show. We had fresh pictures every week. It was meant to represent the writer's bench of the 2000s – where you experience the trains, not on the tracks, but on the internet – where the flux of images is always changing.

Andrea, I can see that your claim that the appreciation of graffiti occurs through reproductions clearly relates to 1984's photographic installations, which seem designed to evoke writers' own practices of appreciation.

But still, the appreciation of graffiti in its subcultural sense is arguably more hands-on than a mainstream model of the passive appreciation of art in museum space would allow. Does the appreciation of graffiti involve a more participatory process?

Andrea Baldini: Yes, graffiti and street art are forms of spontaneous artistic creation within the public domain, in that they generate or create or engender some kind of response within the public. The public is actually constitutive of the work, rather than just involving a passive response or some kind of contemplation. This kind of appreciation becomes a form of active and creative reception.

Even down to maybe making marks on the wall in response? Which of course, you could not (usually) do in museum space.



Fig. 32. Blackbook installation, 2016. Photograph © Paolo Terzani

Definitely. But I think again there are many different artistic practices. You also can find this kind of interactive model in public art, and in participatory art. I don't think that there is anything unique about this kind of participatory model. Yet there are peculiarities about the ways in which we – or writers, or even the general public – react to graffiti or street art.

The museum is a public space. Of course, you can allow for certain kinds of responses, but it creates a certain disposition to react. This is different to how you react in the street but the strength of Pietro's work is the idea of building a continuity between the street and the museum, so that what happens in the museum is not a transformation of the practice, but rather an evolution. What you find in *1984* is something that adds up to what you might find outside but it doesn't want to substitute – it wants to extend the possibilities for these forms of creative communication.

I'm curious about your use of the experience of viewing photographs of Dondi's work as an example to ground your claim that, "reproductions do not lack any of the salient properties that are relevant to the appreciation of graffiti."

The late Dondi now has the status of a founding father – but his work is now arguably inseparable from the photography of Martha Cooper, and the canonical status of 'Subway Art.' How well does a legendary example like Dondi fit with the lesser-known artists' work presented in 1984?

I think that there are two issues here. One is the question of whether photographs can convey all the essential properties that are necessary for the appreciation of graffiti and the other is whether these forms of reproduction (photographs and videos) can acquire the status of art per se.

To some extent I don't see these questions as essentially related. I never met a writer who said, "I never seen a piece by Dondi" "I don't know his style" actually they tend to say exactly the opposite.

But is this not, in part, as proof of subcultural membership?

They study the style, so yes of course, but then things get more complicated. Dondi has become an historical figure, so there are layers of value – historical value, and what you consider of value in graffiti – its subversiveness, style, getting up, all the things that one can attach to these works. So, in general of course, one might say that Martha Cooper's photographs are works of art per se. For instance, Aurelio Amendola is a photographer of Michelangelo's sculptures. It's very difficult to say that Aurelio's photographs are pictures of just the artworks of Michelangelo, because to some extent they are also works of art in their own right.

So, it seems to me that this can happen all the time. There might be better or worse photographs, but it's like there are wars of better or worse graffiti. Sometimes the photograph is not that good – why should you add a layer of significance to what you're looking at?

A lot of writers consider that actually part of what they do involves the act of taking a picture. In 1984, there is

a photograph of the piece by Zelle Asphaltkultur – the whole train with the explosion. That is a heroic kind of shot. I think that perhaps it was more difficult to get the shot than it was to make the piece.

The recent discovery of a long lost Dondi tag in Manhattan had the aura of an original relic being uncovered. Does that demonstrate that the aura of an original may have an impact that perhaps a reproduction does not?

I am always very sceptical about this idea of the aura. I find it very scary!

I think that what we can see are different layers of the same object. So, we look at the object from different perspectives that are not mutually exclusive. Something that doesn't have an historical value lacks some of the properties that we see in something that has historical value. Which seems to be what happens with Dondi's work and the work of Martha Cooper.

But it also seems to me absolutely reasonable to say that Martha Cooper's photographs are artworks per se and this might not be the case for a lot of what we have seen in 1984. Of course, these are not historicised pieces, so we look at them in slightly different ways. But while there might be different varieties of ways in which we approach these photographs, I think they are compatible, even when there are additional layers.

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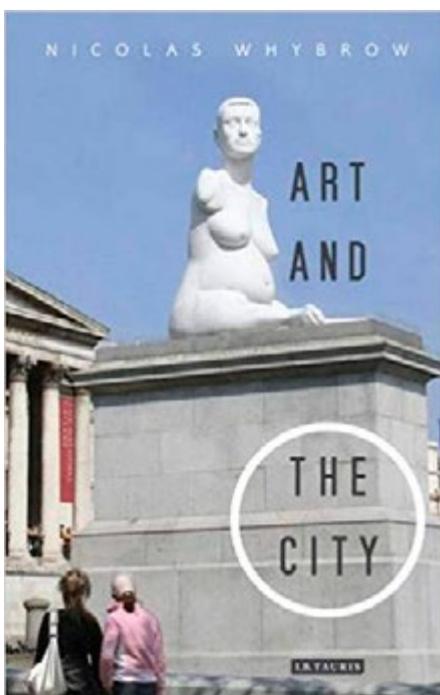


Zelle Asphaltkultur. Detonation Boulevard #44 (ongoing project). 2016. Photograph courtesy of the artists

The future of art is urban

**Nicolas Whybrow
discusses his recent
book, Art and the City**

Nicolas Whybrow is Professor of Urban Performance Studies in the School of Theatre & Performance and Cultural & Media Policy Studies at the University of Warwick, Coventry, UK. His most recent books are *Art and the City*, and the edited volume *Performing Cities*. He is currently writing a book on contemporary art biennials in Europe (for Bloomsbury). Nicolas is the principal investigator in a 3-year UK Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded research project entitled *Sensing the City: An Embodied Documentation and Mapping of the Changing Uses and Tempers of Urban Place* which commenced in April 2017 and will undertake a series of site-specific studies of urban rhythms, atmospheres, textures, practices and patterns of behaviour.



Thejaswini Jagannath: What was the impetus behind writing *Art and the City*?

Nicolas Whybrow: In general terms, the impetus was provided by a desire to write about the way art engages and is integrated in increasingly varied ways in urban contexts. That desire arose against a backdrop of a growing urban population on a global scale – the tipping point of a predominantly urban, as against rural (or ‘other’) population famously occurring in 2007 – which made the question of how to live in cities all the more pertinent. Being a theatre and performance studies academic I was particularly interested in the way the triangular relationship between urban environment, people and art was

a performative one. In other words, one that was premised on interactivity and movement in space and therefore productive of some form of dynamic.

Far from art being 'mere aesthetic adornment' I was keen to make the case for art to be seen as constitutive of the city. In the same way as we accept that architects and planners build cities, so art actively contributes to the construction of the urban, and the citizen is central in that process. In a specific sense I was intrigued by a phrase culled from the space theorist Henri Lefebvre which predicted that the future of art was 'not artistic', as he puts it, but urban. It was the paradox of art not being art on the one hand and the promise of art being irrevocably contingent upon the urban that fascinated me. The former points towards an anti-elitist vision of art that is bound up with citizens' inherent rights to the city, while the latter seemed to me to be reflected in a growing preoccupation with matters urban, visible in the work of artists. So, many artworks, far beyond those specifically sited or taking place in the city as public art or event, appeared to be driven by the question of urban life. I was interested, then, in writing about that which Nicolas Bourriaud had referred to in his book *Relational Aesthetics* – and in an echo of Lefebvre's view – as 'a growing urbanisation of the artistic experiment' on a global scale.

Why do you think public art is specifically important in today's cities?

I think I would have to preface my response by stating that I think public art in cities has infinitely widened its scope in recent times to the extent that it is probably more accurate to talk of an expanded field of urban aesthetics. So, a multifarious new aesthetic has emerged that locates itself in, and is contingent upon urban contexts, and that frequently enlists a participatory spectatorship.

This view references, first, Rosalind Krauss' seminal notion of the expanded field of sculpture as, in essence, an elaboration of the possibilities of the object in space, and, second, more radical, contemporary diversifications of the concept (see, for example, Grubinger and Heiser's *Sculpture Unlimited*), taking into account various recent 'turns' in art making: site-specific, everyday, social, cultural, relational, participatory, live, digital, performative and so on.

Moreover, the various forms in question span the official (funded, commissioned, institutionally framed etc) and the unofficial: playful interventions by ordinary citizens which might include free running, tagging (graffiti), flash/freeze mobs etc. One of my concerns in *Art and the City* is to show how there is an implicit dialogue not only between diverse artworks occurring in any one city but also between so-called high and low or official/unofficial forms. The importance of art in cities rests on the way it holds a vital and integrated position. That is, art is thoroughly implicated within

the day-to-day workings of urban life and can therefore be said to be as essential as any other amenity available in the city.

At the same time, it possesses aesthetic properties that are particular to it and contribute to its potency, though these take a wide range of forms. Thus, art is indispensable and this is accounted for in part by its capacities to tease out the complexities of modern urban living. This might include drawing attention to the latter's fragile, often fragmented or dispersed nature and therefore its problems. So, part of the implicit function of art is to initiate and facilitate forms of public critique for the general good of the urban populace.

Can you give some examples of prominent public art which has given significance to their landscape?

Some resonant examples might be the decisive role Christo and Jeanne Claude's fortnight-long wrapping of the Berlin Reichstag building in 1995 had in focusing the post-Cold War renewal of both urban and national imaginaries after the fall of the Wall in 1989. Or, at a less spectacular but doubtless more controversial level, there is the artist Rachel Whiteread's Holocaust memorial installation unveiled in 2000 in Vienna city centre's Judenplatz, which – without particularly setting out to do so – brought to the surface not only a city's but a nation's collective denial of any perceived need to come to terms with its implication in a recent national socialist past.

And, at the more 'unofficial' end – arguably – of the art spectrum, who would gainsay the effectiveness of the infamous and anonymous Banksy's contribution to cultivating a spontaneous, responsive form of urban conversation – if not spat – via his witty and provocative throw-up cartoons and statements? Relating most memorably perhaps in the public imagination to various parts of London, his recent interventions have been making provocative incursions on a daily basis into the streets of New York City, to the apparent chagrin of the local hardcore tagging community, which evidently perceives its right to critique its own home turf is being usurped by an interloper (Banksy declared himself to be artist-in-residence in the city for the period of a month in late 2013).

In your book, you mention the works of Lefebvre and other urban theorists. Why is it important to take note of the theory behind art to understand the city?

I'm not sure I entirely understand the question in the way it's phrased, but first a spatial adjustment: I'm not convinced such theory is 'behind' art. If it can be situated anywhere it is perhaps more 'in and around', whereby its fluidity, reciprocity (in relation to art) and capacity to evolve is key.

Artists may be influenced by certain theories or may even be consciously testing them through their artworks, but from my perspective as a writer about art and the city, the theories of a Lefebvre provide essential tools with which to interrogate both urban life and art. So, as I explained above, my aim was to see whether his prediction relating to the future of art as an urban-bound phenomenon held up some forty years after he articulated it (his future was my present).

To pursue the point a little further: Lefebvre was an influence on the early thinking and practices of the Situationist International whose instinctive position – as a radical political movement – on art, was to dismiss it (they were referring principally to the bourgeois art world) and to align it with the general spectacularisation or banal commodification of urban life. In fact, the Situationists gave birth to a whole host of highly radical creative practices that have acquired a particular currency with artists in recent times but which emerged and evolved as a result of their particular socio-economic and cultural critique of urban life and a desire to give validity to everyday practices. “I would feel out of place were I not living in the city. In that generic sense, I need it.”

What is your relationship with the urban realm?

I’ve always lived in cities, which is not an unusual thing in itself, of course. But I’ve always felt myself to be an urban dweller. In other words, I would feel out of place were I not living in the city. In that generic sense I need it. Having said that, no one city is like another – which is part of the appeal of having a creative and research-based interest in urbanity – and I have lived in ones as varied as Barcelona, Ankara, Belgrade, Edinburgh and West Berlin (globally speaking that actually represents quite a limited geographical realm, however). My interest in writing about cities evolved from a specific book project entitled *Street Scenes* (2005) in which I attempted to ‘find Brecht’ in Berlin some ten years after the Wall came down, using a Benjaminian walking-and-writing methodology. In other words, I spent a few months in the rapidly-changing new Berlin of the early 21st century to see whether the radical ideas of those ‘Berlin natives’ Benjamin and Brecht still had currency in my attempt to grasp what was going on in the city.

How do you think art has shaped or changed the cities of today compared to previous decades?

I’m not an urban historian, so I would find it difficult to make such temporal comparisons and pronounce on that with any conviction or profundity. It’s also difficult to generalize – globalisation or no – about the ‘cities of today’ since local circumstances are subject to all kinds of complex cultural and political factors, so it’s a very varied picture. What I will say is that the idea of art figuring in – that is, shaping or changing – the urban realm is not by any means new. So, ‘previous decades’ aside, historically speaking one need only

mention the culturally rich cities of (ancient) Athens, Rome and Constantinople/Byzantium (Istanbul) to illustrate the point. By the same token, I’m sure there are endless instances of cities in history where art has played a minimal role for whatever reason (repressive regimes, poverty, war etc) or has gone from playing a significant role to becoming marginalized owing to changing fortunes. And that would apply in the present day as well.

To return to Lefebvre, what he bewailed was the fact that art had been taken out of the hands of citizens, where it had once been (see, precisely, Athens), and had become institutionalized – that is, literally ‘housed’ or stuck in buildings (theatres, for example) when it had once been in the public realm of ‘the street’. For him, then, the future of art resided in the promise of a return to the space of the city, a move that was, as he puts it, ‘fundamentally linked to play, [to] subordinating to play rather than to subordinate play to the “seriousness” of culturalism’. In other words, he was asserting the right of the urban dweller to a form of participatory citizenship through ‘spontaneous theatre’. And I think there are many contemporary instances of this essential idea of democratisation being embraced and being decisive in shaping the way cities are perceived, from the impromptu Qash mob to something like Gormley’s durational, living sculpture *One and Other* on the fourth plinth at London’s Trafalgar Square in 2009.

Do you believe art has gained more prominence in today’s cities?

My sense is that there is a greater proliferation of creative forms that either take urban living as their cue or that seek to engage directly with the urban realm and this is bound up with the changing perception of what art is. So, this is where the ‘expanded field’ comes into play. There are many more kinds of art now and public/spectator participation as a prerequisite or integrated part of the artwork is also at a premium in contemporary practices, as a result of which many more people are involved in creative activity.

Art is more accessible to the public these days with more public art being constructed and showcased for the public. This leads to more interaction between the artwork and the public. Why is it important to ensure art is accessible to the public rather than just being tied to museums or art galleries?

This goes back to Lefebvre’s point about the ‘seriousness of culturalism’ and participatory democracies. Museums and galleries themselves have opened up and become popular to a far greater extent (see Tate Modern, for instance, with its staggering and unforeseen annual attendance average of seven million), but they still have a tendency to be seen as the preserve of an educated and/or privileged strata of society. So, if you want to reach the broader

public and allow it to reap the all round critical and inspirational benefit of art, one way is to leave the building.

When writing your book you mention that you had the opportunity to travel. Where did you travel and what did your travels reveal about art in the city?

I didn't really travel very far for the purposes of researching the book! It has a very strong focus on London and that is mainly because it is on my doorstep (although I don't actually live there). But it also has a high degree of creative activity, so it is very appealing and rich in what it has to offer, and there's plenty to write about. Cities for which I left the UK were all German speaking as it happens: Vienna, Berlin and Muenster (where the decennial Sculpture Projects takes place).

But the point of the book was more to write about a variety of urban artworks rather than a variety of global cities. To do the latter one has to have time and money and that's not always easy to engineer if you have formal responsibilities as a full-time academic. Once the book had appeared I found myself being invited to all kinds of cities to give keynotes or participate in exploratory discussions about art and the city (Belgrade, Turku, Copenhagen, Cologne, Winnipeg, Melbourne, to name a few), so it evidently had certain resonances in a range of diverse places.

As far as revelations about art in the city go, that's a bit difficult to sum up in this limited space, but in a general sense I found that sited art serves as an incredibly rich means of navigating the city. That is, of getting your bearings and developing a critical sense of place. I was also fascinated by the way that artworks that have nothing to do with one another in their conception can begin to 'converse', or, more accurately perhaps, can be made to converse with one another 'across town' as it were, thus producing a form of curated portrait or choreography of a city. So, I found 'conversations' in London, for instance, between works by Anthony Gormley, Mark Quinn, freeze mobs, Martin Creed and free running. Curating these conversations amounts to a form of practice (as research) in its own right.

Your book touches on urban geography, anthropology, architecture and art. This makes it very interdisciplinary. What category would you describe your book to be in?

Well, like you say, it's interdisciplinary, so I'm reluctant to pin it down to one category. However, there's a strong performance bias, but then performance (studies) is, arguably, an 'inter-discipline' in itself because of the way it draws from or figures in a range of fields. There's also a strong auto-ethnographic strain inasmuch as I put myself and my encounters with artworks and cities at the heart of the writing, sometimes making use of a walking-as-fieldwork methodology. The final factor worth mentioning is that

it's also a book about writing itself: how to write about art and the city. So, each of the chapters in Part 2 is an excursion into writing or a form of 'site-writing' or 'critical spatial practice', as Jane Rendell calls it.

What guidance would you give young researchers interested in researching art within the realm of cities? How can this topic gain more prominence?

I think there is already a lot of interest in cities and art, as I have argued, and from a range of disciplinary perspectives. So, you have leading cultural geographers such as Nigel Thrift and Steve Pile writing about art and performance in cities, urban designers such as Quentin Stevens looking at unorthodox uses of art in cities, political scientists such as Esther Leslie writing about art practices derived from an engagement with urban waste and so on. The list really is long. So, the topic already has prominence. The global explosion of art biennales and large-scale, site-based performance festivals such as Metropolis in Copenhagen or Infecting the City in Cape Town has also contributed to a form of high visibility in recent years because of the way such events tend to make use of the whole space of the city and therefore suck in all kinds of local constituencies (while simultaneously labouring against accusations of art world elitism and motives of a corporate-consumerist nature).

Aside from that there are the various informal, unofficial and everyday incursions that I have already mentioned (from the individual tag down a residential back alley to the silent mobile clubbing intervention on the main concourse of a metropolitan train station), which arguably arise in some instances as a reaction to increasing 'screen time' – a desire to escape the virtual-digital realm and sense the physical presence or materiality of things and bodies in space.

So, as far as advice to young researchers goes, in one relatively superficial sense I don't think more needs to be said than 'get out there and keep your eyes peeled!' What that implies is inhabiting the space of the city in order to observe and gauge what is going on, so there is a strong fieldwork factor in this form of research.

Art and the City is available from I.B. Tauris, London. <https://www.ibtauris.com/>

Thejaswini Jagannath recently graduated from Master of Planning from the University of Otago. She has authored for numerous online websites and has published widely on city planning issues. She has written two theses on public art and is passionate about city planning.

Instructions for Authors

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